

HENRY COUNTY ENTERPRISE

Saturday, March 9, 2024

(USPS-6)

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Fast Track 2024 makes community connections

By Jessica Dillon

An estimated 1,800 people came out for VIP Night on Tuesday, March 5, to kick off the Martinsville Henry County Chamber of Commerce's Fast Track 2024, a premier trade show designed to connect the local community with businesses, organizations, and services.

Public night was scheduled for Wednesday, March 6, with the number of attendees expected to increase at the event held on the third floor of The Clocktower at the Commonwealth Centre, located at 300 Franklin Street in Martinsville.

Like many making their way to the show Tuesday, Martinsville Mayor LC Jones said, "I pulled into a sea of cars, and made my way through the bristling traffic. I was stopped at the elevator by a sea of people for four minutes and finally had to take the stairs.

"After sneaking by the red carpet, I was greeted with a flood of amazing people and an event that is a great opportunity for our community," Jones said of this year's



Roger Adams, director of the Henry County Parks and Recreation Department, holds Boomerang the Kangaroo to promote the Martinsville Henry County Fair.

event, which provided space for around 100 local and out-of-town vendors to set up unique booths throughout three rooms.

This year's Fast Track revolved

(See Fast Track p. 2)

Martinsville's new manager reflects on first few months

By Taylor Boyd

Nearing the six-month mark of her tenure as Martinsville City Manager, Aretha Ferrell-Benavides discussed the challenges facing the city and its residents, as well as her plans for moving forward.

Not surprisingly after multiple retirements, the biggest challenge the city is facing is stabilization, she said.

"We've had a lot of changes in our staff, you know we had a city manager, assistant city manager, public works director, police chief, community development director, we had a lot of vacancies, and we have a lot of new staff," she said.

She said the city has now almost filled many of the positions through

(See Martinsville p. 7)



Aretha Ferrell-Benavides became the Martinsville City Manager on October 6.



Architectural renderings show different angles of the Bassett Branch Library following the completion of a \$2.25 million expansion project. Fundraising efforts are underway, and donations are accepted.

Fundraising efforts continue for a \$2.25 million library expansion

By Jeff Reid

Last spring, the Bassett Library Steering Committee and the Blue Ridge Regional Library system launched a \$2.25 million capital campaign supporting an extensive renovation and expansion of the Bassett Library with the Harvest Foundation investing \$396,184 to jumpstart the project.

"Since the announcement in March of 2023 we have received donations from our patrons, many civic organizations, and residents of Martinsville and Henry County," said Bassett Branch manager Karen Barley. "We have received \$10,000 from the Friends of the Library and donations from several foundations. We also received a grant from Women in Philanthropy for \$10,000; as well as a community grant for \$5,000 and a few anonymous donations. Currently, Henry County and the West Piedmont Planning District are helping us apply for additional grants."

Barley said that in addition to applying for grants, the Steering Committee of the Bassett Expansion Project is holding fundraising events.

"This past fall we had a 'Touch a Truck' fundraiser, and we were thrilled with the members of the community that participated in the event," Barley said. "Our next fundraiser will be a Thirty-One Bingo at the Heritage Center, the former Bassett Country Club on Satur-

day, April 27; doors will open at 4 p.m. and bingo will begin at 5 p.m. A bingo pack for twenty games will be \$20; and we will also have door prize tickets, silent auction items, a 50/50 drawing, and concessions for sale."

Barley, who has worked at the Bassett Branch Library for 39 years, said that "a public library is no longer just books."

"Today's libraries are more of a community center," she said, "a place to go for information, to enrich, educate and entertain."

Barley said the Bassett library offers programs for all ages, such as basic computer classes, health and wellness programs, arts and crafts, STEM programs, as well as weekly early childhood education programs.

"The staff at Bassett also provides help to job seekers who need to apply for jobs online and we provide help preparing and attaching resumes to those online applications," she said.

"We also help patrons with online applications for Social Security, financial aid (FAFSA), DMV, and other online forms. We also provide free tax forms during the tax season," Barley added.

"In an area that has suffered job loss due to closures of plants resulting in an economically depressed area, the library offers free computer and internet access as well

(See Fundraising p. 7)

Fire department uses grant funds to buy equipment for firefighters



Patrick Henry Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Chief Tommy Hudson received a \$500 check from the Stuart Rotary Club. The department serves both Henry and Patrick counties.

By Taylor Boyd

The Patrick Henry Volunteer Fire Department (PH-VFD) put the funds it received from a federal Assistance to Firefighters grant (AFG) to good use, and invested in breathing apparatus for its firefighters.

Chief Mike Hudson said the department used the \$186,800 grant to purchase 24 self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), or air packs, and 48 SCBA bottles.

"That means you have an air pack with a bottle and

a spare bottle for each air pack," he said.

The cost of the 24 air packs was around \$216,800.

"We received from the federal government \$186,800 and some odd dollars. We actually wrote a check for \$30,000 to supplement the award that we got from the federal government," he said.

Hudson said the SCBAs are required for a firefighter to fight a structure fire.

"That's what the firefighter puts on his back, that's what he breathes

in when he goes in a smoke-filled environment," he said. "They're used for what we call an immediate dangerous to life and health (IDLH) atmosphere, and that's where deep breathing apparatus are required when you go in an IDLH atmosphere whether it be a fire or a hazmat incident."

Hudson said the department uses the SCBA quite a bit and noted the equipment was recently used when responding to a car fire.

"Anytime there's a possibility that

you could get burned lung, anytime you have a

(See Fire Dept. p. 2)

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Fast Track

(cont. from page 1)



Martinsville Sheriff Stever Draper poses next to a Martinsville Sheriff's Office motorcycle.



Catherine Gupton, executive director of the Martinsville Henry County SPCA, is pictured with Maple, one of the agency's residents.



The Martinsville Henry County Historical Society Booth.



Lisa Martin (left) and Carol Wood (right) manned the Blue Ridge Therapy and Landmark Center booth. Both agencies are located in Patrick County.

around the theme 'Milestones,' to mark the chamber's 60th anniversary. Throughout the exhibit floor, some booths exhibited signs highlighting their timeline of achievements. By merging commerce and community, the show helps create stronger bonds in the area.

In the mix of tables in the second room, local charities like the Martinsville Henry County SPCA, representatives from Martinsville Public Schools, and for-profit companies like Imagination Lavender Farm manned booths. Staff members at each table gave out small gifts to those who stopped by, along with brochures to help give interested attendees more information.

Those representing several of the attending companies said the event provides them with a rare opportunity to connect with the public and other business leaders, something that many felt was hard to do during day-to-day activities.

"I think it's a great opportunity to see everyone who is available because you rarely get a chance to reach everyone," said Catherine Gupton, chief operations officer of the Martinsville-Henry County SPCA. Gupton attended the show with one of the now-adopted residents of the center, Maple, a mastiff

mix, to raise awareness for animals in need of homes.

Further down the row of exhibitors was the Martinsville Sheriff's Office booth, which included a motorcade motorcycle. Sheriff Steve Draper interacted with visitors in front of the vehicle. The office often shows up at events like Fast Track to strengthen bonds with the local community.

Piedmont Community Services and Southside Survivor Response Center were among the exhibitors in the third room. Both attended to make the community more aware of the services offered to residents who might need additional support. Patrick & Henry Community College also was on-site promoting many of its trade programs for workers looking to fast-track their careers.

Some local attractions, like the Martinsville Henry County Historical Society and the Virginia Museum of Natural History, were also in the mix, and the latter expressed their feelings towards the event and what Fast Track meant for them.

"We are so happy to be part of the community, and the museum is a fantastic asset that we hope everyone enjoys," stated Bethany Fisher, the museum's experience manag-

er. Fisher was helping to promote the upcoming Reptile Festival on April 20 and had some small exhibits on display.

Barry Fulcher, vice president of the Lester Forestlands also echoed this sentiment, stating that the trade show allowed them to interact with the community outside of business hours and promote some of the company's other endeavors, like their timberlands.

Many of the businesses have attended Fast Track for multiple years and noted that the show is an invaluable community event for networking.

Sharon Shepherd, deputy director of the chamber, said she was pleased with the attendance on both nights and happy with the event's continued growth throughout its 28-year history.

Over the years, Fast Track has been held at multiple venues, occupying between 30,000 and 35,000 square feet of space. The show hit its highest attendance rating in 2020, before being slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Plans are underway for next year, as Fast Track continues its mission of bringing the community, organizations, and businesses together.

Fire Dept.

(cont. from page 1)

house fire, anytime you go into a car wreck where you don't know what you're going" to be "exposed to or not, you put the air pack on your back," Hudson said. "You may or may not have to snap it on and start breathing it, but you go to have it on and be ready to go."

Hudson said the SCBAs also have a shelf life because the bottles are only good for around 15 years.

The bottles are tested every five years to ensure they will sustain pressure, "but after 15 years, you have to get new bottles," he said.

Hudson said the last time the department got new air packs was a little over 20 years ago.

"And they were all worn out of date, we were having issues with them, and so then we got this grant," he said buying new ones was a necessity.

Hudson anticipates the new air packs will last the department 20 to 25 years,

with regular maintenance.

The department pays to have the air packs blow tested every year to ensure they are working properly, he said, adding "A little bit of maintenance will go a long way to keep from having to put, what a quarter of a million dollars out for air packs."

Hudson added the grant was from 2022. The department received the funds at the end of 2023.

"That's how delayed the process is," he said.

He believes Patrick Henry was the only fire department in Virginia to get a grant for 2022, or at least the only one for air packs.

Those interested in donating to the department can mail checks to 3150 County Line Road, Patrick Springs VA, 24133. Anyone wishing to volunteer with the department is encouraged to call (276) 629-7677.



The Patrick Henry Volunteer Fire Department received 24 self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), or air packs, and 48 SCBA bottles with the grant funds.



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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

(Event information/calendar items must be received by 5 p.m. on the Tuesday before the desired publication date. Email to dhall@theenterprise.net.)

Meetings

Wednesday, March 13

Henry County Planning Commission holds public hearings at 6 p.m. in the County Administration Building, Kings Mountain Road, Collinsville.

Monday, March 18

The Patrick & Henry Community College Board Academic & Student Affairs Committee will meet at 11:30 a.m. in Room 145 in the Frith Economic Development Center. This is a public meeting, but the committee will not receive public comment.

The Patrick & Henry Community College Board will meet at 12:30 p.m. in the Hooker Exhibit Hall, Frith Economic Development Center. This is a public meeting, but the Board will not receive public comment.

Events

Saturday, March 9

Dancing for the Arts, 4 p.m. at Martinsville High School Auditorium. Piedmont Arts' fundraiser with a slate of local celebrities dancing in support of the arts. Eight teams will compete to win the most votes, the highest score from the judges and a set of gorgeous mirror ball trophies handcrafted by local artist Terry Mitchell. Tickets, voting, and memberships are available at the museum and at PiedmontArts.org. Tickets are \$30 for reserved seating, \$20 for general admission, and \$5 for K-12 students.

Saturday & Sunday, March 9-10

TheatreWorks will hold auditions for an upcoming production of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)*. Saturday from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., and Sunday, 2 - 4 p.m., 44 Franklin St., UPTown Martinsville

Email questions to production@twcp.net. Performance dates are May 9-11, and 17-19.

Monday, March 11

The Friends of the Blue Ridge Regional Library will meet at 10:30 at the Patrick County Branch Library, 116 West Blue Ridge St., Stuart.

MHC Democratic Committee meets at 7 p.m. in the New College Institute, Baldwin Building, Room 107.

Saturday, March 16

Beers of Ireland with the Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society and Scuffle Hill Brewing Company, 2-4 p.m. in the Historic Henry County Courthouse, 1 East Main St., Uptown Martinsville. The cost is \$10 per person. Reservations must be made by March 10, and fee paid at the door. Make your reservation at <https://jbphillips.wufoo.com/forms/beers-of-ireland/>.

Horsepasture Volunteer Fire Department Pancake Breakfast, 7 a.m. until. Plates are \$7 and include pancakes, syrups and bacon.

Saturday, April 20

Spring Craft Show, 9-5 at Bassett High School, 85 Riverside Drive, Bassett. Tickets are \$5. Children 5 and under are admitted free.

Friday, March 29

Exhibit Opening Reception – Salvador Dali, Citizens and Soldiers, and Works by Meritha Alderman at Piedmont Arts. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education Michael R. Taylor, PhD will present a gallery talk at 6:15 p.m. Free and open to the public. Complimentary wine and light refreshments. Live music.

ONGOING

The Martinsville-Henry County Lions Club regularly meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Pacific Bay Restaurant, 530 Commonwealth Blvd, Martinsville.

The Bassett Ruritan Club has a breakfast on the 2nd Saturday of each month from 6 - 10 a.m. The cost is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children under 12. All you can eat sausage, fried bologna, eggs, cooked apples, sausage gravy, made from scratch biscuits, made to order pancakes, coffee and juice. Dine in or carry out.

AWANA meets at Blackberry Baptist Church on Sundays, from 4-6 p.m.

TOPS FIELDALE VA 0626 meets each Tuesday at 5:45 pm at the Rangeley Ruritan Building on 134 Calloway Drive, Fieldale, VA. New members are welcome. For more information, call Patti at (276) 358-0489.

The Bassett Ruritan Club hosts Rook Music & More on Fridays from 10 a.m. - noon. Play Rook, work puzzles, make a craft and listen to a mixture of bluegrass, country & gospel music by different bands each week. If you want, bring a snack to share. This event is free to the public.

Any donations received will go to the Bassett Ruritan Club to pay for electricity etc.

The Blue Ridge Regional Library offers free one-day passes to the Virginia Museum of Natural History and the Henry County YMCA with your library card. The passes are good for one day and exclude special events. There is a wait period before you can check out the pass again. For more details and exclusions, visit brrl.lib.va.us.

The Fontaine Ruritan Club hosts Bingo every Tuesday at 1903 Joseph Martin Highway, Martinsville. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and games begin at 7. Money from Bingo supports community service awards, scholarships, and other community efforts.

Book Bingo on the 4th Tuesday of the month at the Martinsville Branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library, 11 a.m. to noon. Call (276) 403-5430 to register.

Medicaid eligibility renewals have resumed. Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness (MHCCHW) offers Medicaid/FAMIS application and renewal assistance for Virginia residents from birth to 64 years of age in-person: Wednesdays 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at Community Storehouse, 128 E. Church St (lower level of the old Leggett Building) in Martinsville, or by phone, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. MHCCHW's specially trained Medicaid/FAMIS Outreach Advocate is available to help. Call or text Ann Walker at (276) 732-0509 to learn more or for an appointment.

The Henry County Adult Learning Center offers free in-house and online classes to help prepare for college, career, or earn your high school equivalency or GED. Call (276) 647-9585.

Neighbors in the Know. Everyone is invited to join staff and volunteers in the Hylton Library at the Spencer Penn Centre for activities and socializing on the first and third Monday of each month. A different presentation and activity weekly, followed by a way to get you moving. The program is an hour long and activities for children will be provided. Every third Monday, 10-11 a.m., a music program will be provided. This free program is perfect for all ages. No registration is required.

Mondays - March 11, March 25, and April 11, at 11 a.m., Holly Kozelsky, executive director of MHC Historical Society, will teach others how to use microfilm to read old newspaper articles at the Martinsville branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library.



Former Pres. Donald Trump and Del. Wren Williams are pictured Saturday at a rally in Richmond.

Trump visited Richmond ahead of Super Tuesday

Former Pres. Donald Trump appeared at a Get Out the Vote Rally in Richmond in advance of Super Tuesday on March 5. Del. Wren Williams, R-Stuart, was among the speakers at the event which attracted thousands, according to reports from the scene. The rally was held in the Greater Richmond Convention Center. Trump went on to win Tuesday's Republican Primary, and President Joe Biden, a Democrat, secured his party's nomination. (Contributed)

Be sure to like the Henry County Enterprise on Facebook

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Opens in Virginia Program Provides Free Tax Prep Help to All

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide is providing free in-person and virtual tax assistance and preparation now through April 15 throughout Virginia. The nation's largest free, volunteer-based tax assistance and preparation program helped secure more than \$1.1 billion in refunds for more than 1.5 million taxpayers last year. Tax-Aide is offered in conjunction with the IRS, and AARP membership is not required.

Tax-Aide volunteers provide free tax preparation and filing services to adults with low to moderate income in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Volunteers are trained and IRS-certified every year to ensure they understand the latest changes to the U.S. Tax Code. Since the pandemic, AARP Foundation has seen a significant increase in volunteer applications nationwide, with over 20,000 people applying to help older adults file their tax returns in 2023.

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide offers several options for taxpayer assistance:

In-Person Service: In Tax-Aide's traditional in-person service, taxes are prepared and filed by IRS-certified tax counselors.

One-Visit Scan (Internet access required): Tax documents are scanned at the Tax-Aide site and then Tax-Aide volunteers prepare the return remotely.

Two-Visit Scan: Tax documents are scanned at the Tax-Aide site and then volunteers prepare the return remotely. During a second visit, taxpayers work with a volunteer to finalize their return and obtain a printed copy for their records.

Drop Off Service: Tax documents are left at the Tax-Aide site with an IRS-certified volunteer and the return is prepared remotely. During a second visit, taxpayers work with a volunteer to file their return and obtain a printed copy and their original documents.

No Site Visit Required (Internet access required): Taxpayers upload tax documents to the IRS-provided software. Tax-Aide volunteers prepare the return remotely and work with the taxpayer to file the return electronically.

Online Coaching: The taxpayer prepares their own return and receives online support from an IRS-certified volunteer to help them along the way.

Facilitated Self-Assistance: Taxpayers schedule an appointment at a Tax-Aide site to work with a volunteer to complete and file their own return.

Self-Preparation: The taxpayer prepares their own return using a software product made available through our website.

Access to the different types of taxpayer assistance varies by location.

"AARP Foundation Tax-Aide helps anyone secure tax credits and much-needed refunds they've earned while saving on tax preparation costs," said Mioshi Moses, Vice President of AARP Foundation Volunteer Programs. "Millions of people, especially older adults living on fixed incomes, depend on their refund to pay for monthly expenses like food and utilities. Last year, older adults with low income saved over \$564 million in total with the help of Tax-Aide."

Users can find the nearest Tax-Aide location in their area and assistance options by visiting the Tax-Aide site locator. The site locator features a Tax-Aide chat bot that can help book an appointment, answer questions about the program and transfer the conversation to a live agent if needed or requested. For more information, including which documents to bring to the tax site, visit aarpfoundation.org/taxaide or call 1-888-AARPNOW (1-888-227-7669).

Hatcher recognized for service

Henry County Sheriff's Lt. Jeff Hatcher was named Patrol Deputy of the Quarter for his proactive role and dedication to reducing the distribution of narcotics. Hatcher, left, played an intricate role in obtaining multiple narcotic search warrants for the Henry County Sheriff's Office. Henry County Sheriff Wayne Davis, right, presented Hatcher with the award.



OPINION

General Assembly Report

Del. Eric Phillips

As we head into the last scheduled week of the 2024 General Assembly session, I find myself reflecting on my first week and what seemed like a blur. After being elected, I had less than 16 hours to find a place to stay, pack my clothes, and be in Richmond to be sworn-in as the Delegate to the 48th District. I want to take this time to thank all my family, friends, and supporters for putting their trust in me and for making my first session a wonderful experience. It has been truly humbling to participate in our legislative process and represent the great people in our district.

My bill, HB 1451 allows expedited retakes of Standards of Learning assessments and remediation, passed the House unanimously but failed in the Senate Public Education Subcommittee. If legislation fails in a subcommittee, it still goes to the full standing committee for a final determination. In this case that is the Senate Education and Health Committee. On February 29th, HB 1451 was before the Senate Education and Health Committee and there were many supporters in attendance and lots of lively discussion; however, it failed again on the first vote with a tally of 6 to 9. After I left the Committee room and unbeknownst to me at the time, a member of the Committee asked that the bill be reconsidered whereby it advanced out on a vote of 9 to 6. Hopefully, by the time you read this newsletter, it will have passed the Senate and on its way to the Governor's desk. This is just one example of how quickly the tide can change here.

As you may recall, I previously talked about fentanyl legislation that had hit a roadblock in the House. I am pleased to report that

we have made significant progress in reviving this much needed fight of this deadly fentanyl epidemic and the House advanced a Senate bill that would make the use of pill presses to manufacture fake pills laced with fentanyl its own crime. Our Virginia schools have seen a rash of fentanyl overdoses. Students may be told they're buying a friend's Adderall or other prescription medication, when in fact they're getting a fake pill with an almost lethal dose. My Republican colleagues and I pushed hard to get this bill a hearing, and I'm pleased to say that it was reported to the floor on a unanimous vote from the Appropriations Committee. It will likely be up for final passage this week.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate budgets remain in conference and negotiations began over the weekend to work out differences between the two spending plans. Regardless of its contents, negotiators are obligated to finish their work this week, so both chambers can vote on a final version or before March 9th. If we do not pass the budget, then a special session will be called, and we will have to come back to Richmond until it passes. Governor Youngkin will also review the budget and send down amendments and line-item vetoes, which we will then consider at our one-day Reconvene Session in April.

As always, our door is open in Richmond for visits and to share your positions on legislation coming before the Virginia General Assembly. You can reach us by telephone at (804)698-1048 and by email at delephillips@house.virginia.gov. You can also track legislation and watch session and committee meetings at <https://virginiageneralassembly.gov/>.

Rural Health Care & Pharmacies

Since coming to Congress, I have worked to find ways to protect and promote access to health care for rural Americans.

One aspect of rural medicine I have tried to help on a federal level is pharmacies. For many in rural areas, visiting pharmacies and interacting with pharmacists is one of the most important points of access for health care in small towns and communities. Pharmacists are trusted members of the community, who help provide relief to those in need.

Pharmacies have faced some tough challenges. Not long ago, UnitedHealth Group (a health care group that operates Optum and United Healthcare platforms) was the victim of a cyberattack. This complicated prescription deliveries for six days as many pharmacies were unable to process prescriptions. Pharmacies have also faced challenges as this country continues to deal with chronic drug shortages, ranging from chemotherapy drugs to antibiotics to ADHD medications. Though wanting to help, some pharmacies have been unable to dispense critical, life-saving medications.

Over the years, I have looked for ways on a federal level to assist pharmacies, while also helping Americans get better access to health care. Below is a summary of bills I recently introduced or co-sponsored that are related to pharmacies.

H.R.5393 - Transparency and Fairness for Pharmacies Act

Pharmacists, including rural pharmacists, have been increasingly charged retroactive fees, known as Direct and Indirect Remuneration (DIR) fees, after prescriptions are filled. These fees hurt, and sometimes destroy, the pharmacists' business. Imagine you bought a product for resale for \$1 and sold it for \$1.03. You find out later that without telling you, the company changed the price several months after you sold the product and now has the right to come back and say, "Oh, we really should have charged you \$1.20." You have now lost 17 cents on the transaction. That's how DIR fees work. Believe it or not, this happens to pharmacists routinely.

To make matters worse, a majority of these pharmacists say they receive no clear information about when and why these DIR fees will be collected. Many also noted that DIR fees can total tens of thousands of dollars each month. In response to this, I introduced the Transparency and Fairness for Pharmacies Act, which takes steps to help rein in and bring more transparency to these DIR fees and all pharmacy fees by Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs).

My bill would require the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to create standardized quality metrics for health plans and PBMs to use when determining payments to pharmacies.

H.R.5400 - Neighborhood Op-



Morgan Griffith

Representative

tions for Patients Buying Medicines Act

PBMs act as an intermediary between pharmacies, insurance companies, drug manufacturers, etc. whose purpose is to negotiate drug prices. We have seen that PBMs can manipulate drug prices through various ways to enhance their own profits, hurting Americans' bottom line and the pharmacies who deal with them.

I co-sponsored H.R. 5400, which would modernize Medicare and enhance PBM accountability by preventing them from discriminating against pharmacies that are willing to contract with them, helping seniors seek care closer to home. This will ensure that PBMs do not provide unfair contracts to independent pharmacies where that independent pharmacy wouldn't accept the contract because the reimbursement rate for medications is so low their patients would lose access to that drug.

H.R.1770 - Equitable Community Access to Pharmacist Services Act

Pharmacies have the ability to provide a variety of services beyond just filling prescriptions. Currently, certain tests and vaccines administered by pharmacies are not reimbursable by Medicare.

I co-sponsored legislation, Equitable Community Access to Pharmacist Services Act, to establish a federal reimbursement mechanism for pharmacists' services under Medicare and ensure patients can continue to access essential care and services provided by pharmacists. This will now allow for Virginia pharmacists to test and treat for strep, flu, and COVID-19 and get reimbursed by Medicare for it.

H.R.5526 - Seniors' Access to Critical Medications Act

Many seniors living in the Ninth District and in other rural areas are not physically able to travel to pick up their much-needed prescriptions, whether it be from pharmacies, doctor's offices, etc.

I co-sponsored legislation, Seniors' Access to Critical Medications Act, that would allow for patients to have their caregivers/loved ones pick up the prescription on their behalf, making life easier for seniors.

These bills are just some ways I am currently helping pharmacies and rural Americans. I will continue to explore other ways to promote and protect access to health care.

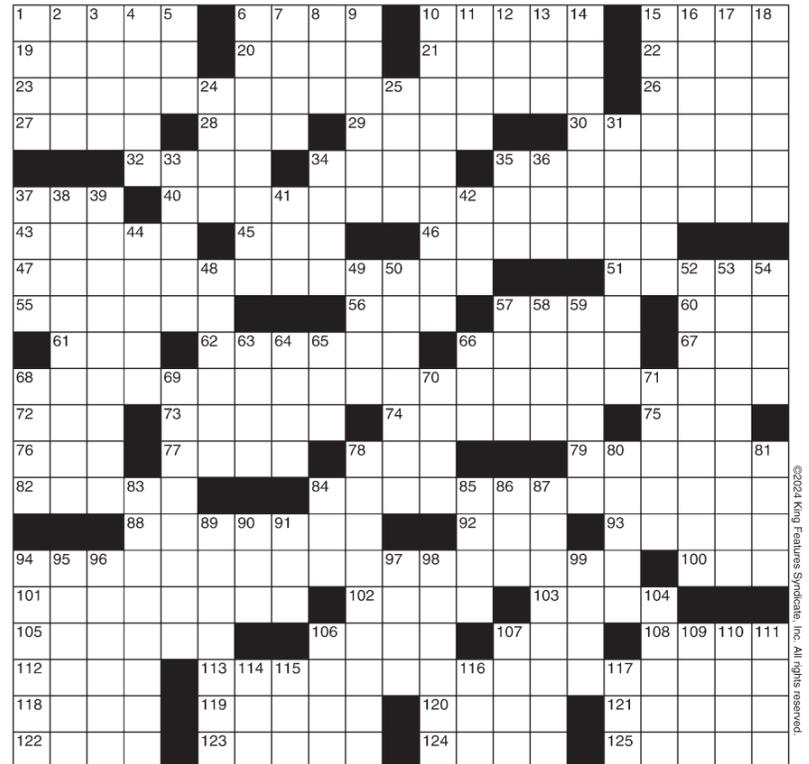
If you have questions, concerns, or comments, call my Abingdon office (276) 525-1405, Christiansburg office (540) 381-5671, or via email at <https://morgangriffith.house.gov/>.

Letters to the Editor Guidelines

Henry County Enterprise welcomes letters to the editor and/or reader viewpoints of 500 words or less. Submissions may be edited for clarity, length, legal ramifications or general taste at the editor's discretion. We reserve the right to refuse to publish submitted letters for the same reasons. All letters must be signed by an individual and include community. Letters that do not meet these guidelines will not be considered for publication. Viewpoints and opinions expressed in letters selected for publication are the opinions of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Henry County Enterprise.

Super Crossword ADDITIVE-FREE

- ACROSS: 1 Not suitable, 6 Sorry to intrude..., 10 Capricious ideas, 15 Cartoonist, 19 Payments to the IRS, 20 Oscar winner, 21 Capital of Vietnam, 22 Sword handle, 23 Fifth Avenue skyscraper, 26 Other, in Acapulco, 27 Identity hider, 28 Altitudes: Abbr., 29 -C (PC copy command), 30 What a groom may toss, 32 "Uh-huh" Abbr., 34 Pioneer, 35 Orthodox Jewish movement, 37 Rapper - Rida, 40 Technique for viewing a slow process quickly, 43 Cattle farm, 45 Prefix with nourished, 46 In a daze, 47 First first lady of the U.S., 51 Gets close to, 55 Sesame seed paste, 56 Pucksters' org. with the Calder Cup, 57 Newspaper think piece, 60 Born as, 61 Toon sheet, 62 Hedy of "Ecstasy", 66 Rome's - Fount, 67 Dollar bill, 68 Advance inquiry into a crime, e.g., 72 Israeli city close to Ben Gurion Airport, 73 Big name in life, 74 Decrease, 75 Doc for the neck up, 76 D-H linkup, 77 FDR or HST, 78 Former "Idol" judge, 79 Bob of play-by-play, 82 Wolfed down, 84 Launching of people into orbit, 88 Insurance payment, 92 "The Simpsons" shopkeeper, 93 Was overlong, 94 Dual-focus course about bodily structures, 100 Some kitchen appliances, for short, 101 From a northwest Italian port, 102 Certain South African quaint headpiece, 103 Jacuzzi, e.g., 11 Recital venue, 12 Not Rep. or Dem., 13 Mimi's "me", 14 Celebrates with a tune, 15 Animal with a backbone, 16 Relative of a shout-out, 17 Anew, 18 Tempestuous cuisine, 24 Spicy, 25 - Reader (magazine), 31 Carrier based in New Delhi, 33 Hawke of film, 34 Salvador of surreal art, 35 Spicy, 36 From - Z, 37 Sig Nu, e.g., 38 Video game tomb raider, 39 Teetering, 41 - di-dah, 42 Attila follower, 44 Refrigerate, 48 More artful, 49 - a soul, 50 " - in Manila" (All-Frazier fight), 52 Consecrating, 53 Nevada airport, 54 In view, 57 Mining finds, 58 Sampras of the court, 59 Show plainly, 63 Poker cost, 64 Supplies with personnel, 65 Coach, 66 Parseghian, 66 LG or RCA products, 68 Petition, 69 "Thumbs-up!", 70 Gas in signs, 71 Gasless car, 78 Tipoffs in hoops, e.g., 80 Christie's "A Pocket Full -", 81 Depots: Abbr., 83 Not old-fashioned, 84 Cabinet dept. since 1965, 85 Twosome, 86 Abbr. on military mail, 87 Societal, 89 It might have mascara on it, 90 Pas' mates, 91 Opal ending, 94 Horror-struck, 95 All-Star pitcher Denny, 96 Yearly, 97 Gordie of hockey, 98 Itched (for), 99 Seine feeder, 104 Trendy again, 106 Stimulate, 107 - fide, 109 Phony, 110 Creates a lap, 111 Blood type, for short, 114 Prefix with pagan, 115 Part of TTYL, 116 HST follower, 117 Loud noise



Applications now accepted for Virginia Service and Conservation Corps

Virginia State Parks is recruiting members for its 2024 Virginia Service and Conservation Corps (VSCC) AmeriCorps Interpretive Guide Program. VSCC AmeriCorps members will create and lead interpretive programs within the state park they are assigned, such as guided hikes and paddles, campfires and educational programs about the park's history and wildlife. Eligible applicants must be at least 18 years old with a high school diploma, a US citizen and be able to serve 450 hours from May 3 to August 16. This program has no upper age limit and is great for those wanting to learn more about environmental education, conservation and park operations. The application deadline is April 12. Benefits of being a VSCC Amer-

iCorps member include a living stipend of \$9,152 dispersed in bi-weekly increments, an education award upon successful completion and hands-on job skills in a state park.

VSCC AmeriCorps members play a crucial role in connecting individuals with the natural, historical and cultural treasures that define Virginia's diverse landscapes. By passionately sharing knowledge and creating impactful interpretive programs, VSCC AmeriCorps members not only contribute to the preservation of Virginia State Parks but also empower communities to become stewards of their surroundings.

To learn more about the 2024 VSCC AmeriCorps Interpretive Guide Program or to apply, please go to virginiastateparks.gov/ameriCorps-interp-trail.

See more at www.henrycountyenterprise.com

OPINION

Bring on the snow March, we have a right to expect it

We are here today, brothers and sisters, to mourn a great loss, while we also try to celebrate the happiness that once was.

It is a loss of joy and pleasure, and of people coming together. We once took what we have lost for granted, but now we regret its absence.

It is snow, that wintery treat we await with anticipation each year.

When it snows, outside life is suspended, and we have the gift of an unscheduled holiday at home.

Of course, we say that for the majority who have the kinds of jobs that can be left aside for a snow day now and then, and for students.

Those in medical fields and law enforcement have to go in, no matter what. During most of the years I worked in newspaper, I absolutely had to go in, because the newspaper had to go out. A few years ago, I got internet and all sorts of backup power supplies and internet resources so that I could work from home on snow days, which where we live means the power is bound to go out, but the weather has been so mild I never had to use them.

So essential workers aside – and we appreciate your sacrifices – snow days provided a special kind of life: Sleep in. Cuddle around the fire or propane heater with hot chocolate. Play in the snow, then go back inside and warm up.

It brought a special kind of camaraderie, too. Neighbors and strangers looked out for each other. If you did go out, and your car slid across the road, some kind people would stop and struggle and get your car out for you. On our road, a couple of the men with tractors would go out and plow our driveways, even though we had no intentions of leaving the house. While the men plowed, my daughter and I would shovel our neighbor lady's sidewalk, even though she wouldn't have to use it because we'd bring in her newspaper and, if it ran, her mail for her. We had to do that in a hurry before the men with the tractors finished up the driveways and came over themselves to shovel: We were trying to do our part.

We all have different memories of how long it's been since we've had snow, but we all can agree that it's been a long time. Last year, it did snow on a Sunday. Pictures of the snow in our yards flew across Facebook (is that the new way of celebrating snow? Instead of sledding and making snowmen?) all day, and our social media comments on them kept coming long after the snow had melted a few



Holly Kozelsky

hours later.

A chart I'll list below says we had 7.7 inches of snow in 2022, but I don't remember it. It must have happened on a Saturday when neither school nor work nor church was cancelled.

At the start of this winter my daughter and I looked forward in excited anticipation to the snow, figuring we were due for it this time since we have paid our dues of missing out on it earlier.

U.S. Climate Data tells us that we get – that we have the right to expect – 7 inches of snow a year. ExtremeWeatherWatch.com breaks down snowfall by the year. Let's start with 2010, because that one was exciting: 35 inches.

2010: 35
2011: 3
2012: 5
2013: 3
2014: 33.9
2015: 10.2
2016: 10.7
2017: 12.7
2018: 30.9
2019: 0.2
2020: 0.7
2021: 3.0
2022: 7.7
2023: 0.1
2024: 0

Though this isn't how I remember it, the statistics show that we had five straight years with no snow at all: 2004 through 2008. We had four years without, from 1995 through 1998, and six years without, from 1982 through 1987.

From 1958 through 1969, it snowed a lot every year, ranging from 8.5 inches (1961) to 41 inches (1966).

The earliest the figures go back is to 1930. It snowed each year from 1930 to 1956. In fact, people back then were so used to snow that school and events usually weren't even cancelled, which you can see by reading old editions of our local newspapers.

It may be a little early to feel sorry for ourselves on that matter. March has always shown itself to have a few tricks up its sleeve. Since 1937, 21 years have had snow after March 12, including 19 inches on March 13, 1993, and the most recent March snowfall, 5 inches on March 25, 2018.

The last election

I read an article the other day by Thom Hartmann. It was possibly the most terrifying thing I've ever read, and I once read an entire book about human parasites.

If you're unfamiliar, Thom Hartmann is a radio host, author, and political commentator. Back on March 12, 2020, he wrote an article about how President Donald Trump was going to attempt to steal the election. He wrote that Vice President Mike Pence would refuse to certify swing state votes and throw the election to the House, which would then keep Trump in office whether he legitimately won or lost the election.

At the time, Democratic strategists thought Hartmann had lost his marbles. The plan he proposed was insane, something that could never actually happen in a functioning Democracy.

Then, 10 months later on January 6th, 2021, Trump tried to do the exact same thing Hartmann had predicted. The only reason the insurrection failed was because Pence grew a conscience somewhere along the line and was unwilling to follow the plan. He nearly got publicly lynched for his efforts.

President Joe Biden made the news this week because in an Oval Office interview with Evan Osnos of the New Yorker, he said that Trump will contest the results of the 2024 election if he loses. I'm not entirely sure why this warranted an article; it's a bit like interrupting the evening news to announce that water continues to be wet. Of course Trump will contest the 2024 election; he still hasn't conceded defeat in the last election, and many of his more delusional supporters believe he's still secretly the President (although they also hate everything Biden is doing and don't see any kind of conflict between those two thoughts).

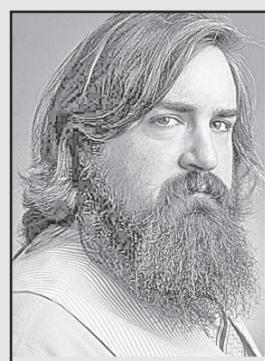
If Trump secures his party's nomination — which seems incredibly likely — and loses to Biden, he'll obviously try to steal the election again. The only question is, what will that look like this time?

In his article "The new secret plan on how fascists could win in 2024," Hartmann lays it all out.

First off, Hartmann says, the Republicans will need to make sure they're in control of the House of Representatives when the next president is certified on Jan. 6, 2025. What if Democrats win back the House later this year? No worries; Speaker Mike Johnson will simply refuse to swear a few of those Democrats into office, citing voting irregularities that must first be investigated.

Would Mike Johnson do such a thing? Sure, he's done it already. He delayed swearing in Tom Suozzi, who won George Santos' former seat, presumably to maintain enough Republican votes to impeach Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas last month. As Hartmann points out, there's nothing illegal about these delays; they're just completely immoral.

These actions would keep John-



By Ben R. Williams

son in charge of the House, allowing him to reject any Electoral College certificates of election that don't swing the way he wants them to; he'll simply claim there are vague problems with the certificates that must be investigated.

Hartmann points out that the whole reason Trump wanted Johnson as Speaker was because he was the one who organized the 138 House members who voted not to certify Biden's win in January 2020. Folks like Congressman Thomas Massie are already planting the seeds for the idea that the House has the final decision on election certification; he posted on Twitter that "Maine, Colorado, and other states that might try to bureaucratically deny ballot access to any Republican nominee should remember the U.S. House of Representatives is the ultimate arbiter of whether to certify electors from those states."

This is all laying the groundwork for a nightmare scenario in which even if Biden wins the electoral college vote, a Republican-controlled House simply refuses to certify the results from several states so that he doesn't clear the 270 vote threshold; at that point, the election is up to the House, and each state gets one vote.

The majority of Americans live in Democrat-controlled states, yet the majority of the states themselves are Republican-controlled. As of now, 26 state delegations are controlled by Republicans while Pennsylvania's delegation is about 50/50, meaning that in this scenario, Trump wins by 26-23.

This complete subversion of the ideals our nation was founded on is perfectly legal, by the way. And who's going to stop it? The Supreme Court?

Right now, Hartmann's argument may seem ludicrous. But if you had told me on Jan. 5, 2021, that domestic terrorists would attempt an insurrection at our nation's Capitol the very next day, I wouldn't have believed that either.

Obviously, I hope Hartmann's dead wrong in his prediction, and I'm sure he does too. But as we approach the 2024 Presidential election, we need to be aware that if we're not careful, there's a non-zero chance that there won't be a Presidential election in 2028.

Dribben named to VCA teaching artist roster

By Taylor Boyd

A Meadows of Dan area woman was recently named to the Teaching Artist Roster of the Virginia Commission for the Arts (VCA) as part of its newest cohort.

According to the VCA, the roster "serves as an online resource for Virginia's nonprofits, units of local and tribal government, or schools seeking professional teaching artists to facilitate immersive and participatory arts residences."

Angela Dribben, who specializes in literary arts and poetry, said there is a competitive application process to get on the roster.

"They are really vetting that person on the roster to see if they do have a firm idea of how to meet certain educational objectives," she said.

As a lot of the roster and applicants teach in public or private schools, Dribben said VCA wants to know if they have an idea of how to use the arts and meet educational objectives so that two things are happening in the classroom.

"They're looking for" evidence "of experience doing it. So, when you apply to be on the roster you're saying 'here's a program that I've done. Here's the objectives that it meets, here's the age groups I've taught it to, here's proof of it,'" she said.

Dribben said being on the roster also allows organizations that might want to bring teachers on to expiate the process.

For example, she said a hospice group might bring a teaching artist on to teach legacy writing, or to write through their grief.

"So, you can use a VCA teaching artist and have good access to grants to cover the cost of that teaching artist. That is a real benefit to be able to do that and not have to go back to the beginning and then vet them," she said.

Personally, Dribben believes being on the roster is a validation that she's on the right path.

"I spent a lot of time writing, submitting, getting published, getting rejected, getting the M.F.A. - it's a huge financial investment and a huge time investment," she said. "In working in the arts as a volunteer...I was do-

ing all of this work, and wondering if it mattered and if I was getting anywhere with it, you know, and wondering about having invested in a M.F.A because so much of my work was volunteer."

Being on the roster also showed Dribben that she was going to be able to make the M.F.A make sense and did deserve to be compensated for the experience that she brings into a classroom.

Dribben said most places she's taught at have been through the VCA. She did Teacher Professional Development for Martinsville City Public Schools and Henry County Public Schools, taught in Henry County schools, Floyd County Public Schools, and the Jesse Peterman Memorial Library.

"I'm getting ready to teach through Floyd Center for the Arts, and I've got an arts camp that I'm doing through Feeding Needles this summer. We're doing big art," she said.

Since being put on the Teaching Artist Roster, Dribben said she's done the legwork herself and been successful.

"The VCA is really, really supportive, and they really help you navigate the process. I do feel like, not just for me, because places in this area could use teaching artists from all over Virginia that are on the roster," she said.

Dribben feels like there's a lot more opportunity to put the teaching artists to work and to use this support from the VCA that's being offered.

"There's this opportunity out there to bring artists of all mediums to the schools, into other programs, so I would love it" for people to contact the artists and have them come, she said.

A published poet, Dribben said she became a little frustrated with the submissions process to get published.

"So, submitting as a poet can become strenuous, demanding, and expensive. It doesn't sound like much, but \$3 a submission, \$4 a submission, \$5 a submission, it adds up, and it's so saturated that the amount of submission that you need to send out can add up," she said.

To submit a book, she said the price range is \$25-30

per book per submission.

"So, I became a little frustrated with the submissions process. I was successful, I have a book out. I mean my publications are probably well over 100 now, but it didn't feel fulfilling to me. I mean, is anyone reading it? It just felt like this weird hamster wheel of money and time and never feeling satisfied," she said.

Dribben then went into working poetry, individual art, and public art.

These are a lot of the classes she currently teaches. Dribben said she does a lot of visual poetry in classrooms because it's accessible and "no matter how you learn something in it, you can work with."

She said it also gives students a place to put their art.

"Because if we write, I feel like most of us write to be heard, to be understood, to connect. I feel like that's really why we're writing. When I was teaching people to write poetry, I didn't want to get them on the same hamster wheel," she said.

Dribben said she's doing more public art than focusing on publishing as she finds it to be more satisfying to connect with others, help them articulate what they want to say, and help them share what they want to say.

In Southwest Virginia, Dribben said the VCA wants to serve as the region has not historically applied for as much support as other parts of the state.

"So, this is an area it has been communicated to me that the VCA is very interested in helping support in the arts. I mean, this just couldn't be a better time to take advantage of the Teaching Artist Roster," she said.

Dribben wants people to feel encouraged to apply or to reach out to a Teaching Artist.

"Most of us would walk someone through the process. You know, so if there's any 'I don't have time to go apply for a grant' or 'I don't know what the process is like,' the process is really straightforward. The teaching artists are very adept at doing it," she said.

To find grants to work with a Teaching Artist Roster member, go to <https://vca.virginia.gov/grants>.

Organizations interested in booking Dribben can reach her at angeladribben@gmail.com.

CLASSIFIED

PUBLISHER'S NOTICE

All real estate advertised in this newspaper is subject to the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968, which makes it illegal to advertise "any preference, limitations or discrimination based on race, color, sex or national origin," or an intention to make any such preferences, limitation or discrimination. Our readers are informed that all dwellings advertised in this paper are available on an equal opportunity basis. This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate or employment which is in violation of the law.

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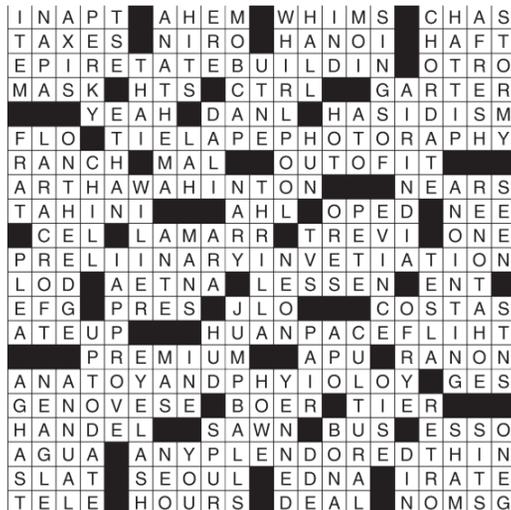
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ADVERTISE!

Fink appointed to new role

The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR) announced that Tracy Fink was appointed the Vice President of the Institute Conference Center (ICC) and Operations, effective March 1. With more than 20 years of experience in strategic event management, Fink brings a wealth of expertise to her new role.

"We are thrilled to welcome Tracy Fink as the new Vice President of the Institute Conference Center and Operations. Her proven and diverse event management experience, strategic vision and commitment to delivering exceptional events and experiences will undoubtedly drive the continued success of the ICC and further our mission of economic transformation in our region." – Telly Tucker, IALR President

Fink is an experienced marketing, sales and event leader known for her strategic leadership and dynamic approach to event management. Her track record includes planning corporate and social events with guest counts exceeding 1,000. Her time working in numerous event-oriented



roles has left her with a deep knowledge of the planning and logistics that go into creating successful experiences and events.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to lead the Institute Conference Center – one of the premier venues in all of Virginia," said Fink. "I look forward to leveraging my experience and passion for event management and commitment to excellence to deliver unparalleled service to our clients and guests."

Fink most recently served as Director of Events and Marketing for Mayfair Hospitality, which oversees several hotels and venues in Winston Salem, N.C. Fink has also worked as a public affairs officer for the U.S. Air Force auxiliary and as an on-air morning show host and sales manager for

a Baltimore radio station. Fink has experience in sales, events and marketing across several industries and in different roles. Fink holds a Bachelor of Science in Public Relations and Mass Communications from Towson University and a Master of Business Administration from Columbus University. Her commitment to the community includes board positions and membership with such groups as the Forsyth County Hospitality Alliance, the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership and Junior League.

"Tracy Fink's extensive experience, community engagement and proven leadership will be invaluable as we continue to elevate the ICC as a leading destination for conferences, meetings and events. We look forward to working together to continue providing exceptional experiences for our clients and guests." – Dr. John Hughes, Executive Vice President, Operations, IALR

Fink is filling this role after the recent retirement of Leslie Dobbins, who worked with the ICC for more than 20 years.

Located in Southern Virginia, the Institute Conference Center (ICC) is a preeminent destination for conferences, meetings and events. Boasting state-of-the-art facilities and unrivaled services and amenities like catering, technology support and event planning, the ICC offers a versatile and customizable space to accommodate gatherings of all sizes. From intimate board meetings to large-scale conferences, the ICC provides a dynamic environment designed to inspire collaboration, innovation and success. The ICC also oversees IALR's on-site cafe, Megabytes.

LEGAL

ORDER OF PUBLICATION Case No. JJ017800-12-00
Commonwealth of Virginia VA. CODE § 8.01-316
HENRY COUNTY J & DR - JUVENILE
Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court
Commonwealth of Virginia, *in re* HERNANDEZ, MARQUS NOE
HMDSS v. UNKNOWN FATHER

The object of this suit is to:
TERMINATE THE RESIDUAL PARENTAL RIGHTS OF THE UNKNOWN FATHER OF MARQUS NOE HERNANDEZ, BORN 1/30/2023 TO ANGEL MICHELLE HALL.

It is ORDERED that the defendant appear at the above-named Court and protect his interests on or before 04/16/2024 at 10:00 a.m. 03/05/2024

LEGAL

COUNTY OF HENRY REZONING PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Pursuant to Section 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia, a series of public hearings has been scheduled for **March 13, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.** in the Summerlin Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, Kings Mountain Rd, Collinsville, Virginia. Following these public hearings, the Planning Commission will make a recommendation on the applications to the Board of Supervisors.

The Henry County Board of Supervisors will conduct public hearings on the following applications on **March 26, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.** in the Summerlin Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, Kings Mountain Rd, Collinsville, Virginia.

The purpose of these public hearings is to receive input into the possible rezoning of property. Following are the specifics of the public hearings.

Case R-24-02 Patrick Henry Farms Corp.

The property is located on the southwest end of St. John's Cir., just beyond the end of State maintenance, in the Iriswood District. The Tax Map number is part of 44.7/13. The applicant is requesting the rezoning of approximately 22-acres from Suburban Residential District S-R to Agricultural District A-1. The applicant intends to use the property for agricultural purposes.

Case R-24-03 Patrick Henry Farms Corp.

The property is located on the north side of the west bound US58 on-ramp to 220/58 By-pass, in the Iriswood District. The Tax Map number is 44.7/14. The applicant is requesting the rezoning of approximately 3.88-acres from Suburban Residential District S-R to Commercial District B-1. The applicant intends to market this, in conjunction with the adjoining commercial property, for proposed business purposes.

Case R-24-04 Richard Cecil

The property is located at 39 Enslow Dr., in the Blackberry District. The Tax Map number is 13.7(12)/17. The applicant is requesting the rezoning of approximately 0.63-acres from Commercial District B-1 to Limited Industrial District I-2. The applicant intends to use the existing garage building as a beverage mixing and bottling company. The applications for these requests may be viewed in the Department of Planning, Zoning & Inspection between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.
Lee H. Clark, AICP
Director of Planning, Zoning & Inspection

LEGAL

Notice of Public Hearing

The City of Martinsville Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on March 20, 2024, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at the City of Martinsville Municipal Building located at 55 W. Church Street, Martinsville, VA, 24112. The purpose of the public hearing will be to consider amendments to the Zoning Ordinance relating to building height restrictions and handicap space requirements.

Questions or comments regarding this matter can be directed to Hannah Powell at hpowell@ci.martinsville.va.us or (276) 403-5156.

Notice Submitted By:
Hannah L. Powell, CZA
Community Development Specialist

LEGAL

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

COUNTY OF HENRY, VA
SOLAR FACILITY SITING AGREEMENT
Pursuant to Section 15.2-2316.8 of the Code of Virginia, the Henry County Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at 6:00 p.m., or as soon thereafter as can be heard, in the Summerlin Meeting Room on the first floor of the Henry County Administration Building at 3300 Kings Mountain Road in Collinsville, Virginia.

The purpose of the public hearing is to receive citizen input on a proposed Solar Facility Siting Agreement between Henry County and Sunny Rock Solar, LLC.

A copy of the full text of the proposed Solar Facility Siting Agreement may be viewed in the Office of the County Administrator in the County Administration Building on Kings Mountain Road, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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Slam the Scam – Social Security Impostors

One of the most popular ways for criminals to steal money and sensitive information is by impersonating a trusted source – often a government agency. According to the Federal Trade Commission, victims of government impostor scams reported nearly \$509 million stolen from them in 2022.

March 7 is National Slam the Scam Day and the focus this year is stopping Social Security impostor scams. Here are three tips to help you do just that.

Beware of unexpected calls, texts or emails claiming there is a problem with your Social Security number. One example is a warning that your number has been linked to criminal activity and suspended. The goal of the scammer is to get you in a heightened emotional state, and this is one common way they do that. Second, the Social Security Administration will only call you if you are already engaged in conversations with the agency. Finally, you can access your account securely at ssa.gov/myaccount. This will give you a safe and reliable place to check on your account if you ever have questions.

Report scams to local law enforcement. For help from AARP, call 1-877-908-3360 or visit the AARP Fraud Watch Network at www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork.

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Fundraising

(cont. from page 1)



Architectural renderings show different angles of the Bassett Branch Library following the completion of a \$2.25 million expansion project. Fundraising efforts are underway, and donations are accepted.

as free wi-fi to connect personal devices. Bassett Branch Library also participates in the USDA Summer Feeding program to provide free lunches to children 18 and younger, when school is not in session," she added.

The existing library building was a former dress shop/florist which was built in 1932 by Clark Construction. Before acquiring the building, the library shared the building across the street with the Bassett Historical Society.

In 1996, the Blue Ridge Regional Library (BRRL) formed a committee to begin fundraising efforts to purchase the library's current facility due to space limitations for increasing programs. The renovations were completed in December of 1998.

Once again, the library finds itself in need of additional space for added services and storage to meet the needs of the community.

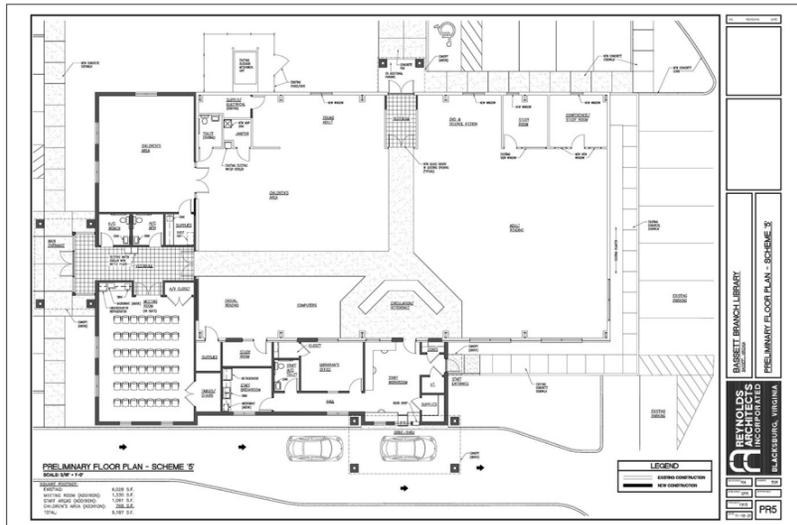
"Currently the Bassett Branch Library is 6,000 square feet with one small meeting room that will hold only 12 people with two tables and chairs," Barley said. "We are us-

ing this meeting room for all programs, and often have standing room only especially during the children's

programs. With our collection growing, as well as the number of people in attendance at programs, we are simply running out of room."

In 2019, the BRRL Board agreed to consult with an architect to investigate expansion possibilities. It chose a Blacksburg firm that specializes in renovating libraries. The pandemic slowed progress, but by 2021, the completed architectural drawings by architect Glenn Reynolds were finalized, and the BRRL Board decided to move forward with fundraising. The plans will increase the size of the library from 6,000 to 10,000 square feet.

Renovations include developing a dedicated area for computers, a larger meeting room that can accommodate 50 people with storage, a kitchenette, and updated restrooms. Additionally, the meeting room will serve as a free community meeting space during and after li-



A preliminary floor plan of the Bassett Branch Library after a \$2.25 million expansion project.

brary hours.

Two planned entrances will alleviate challenges for ingress and egress. Additional handicapped parking and a drive-thru window with a book drop will further provide safe travel in and around the building.

Barley said the renovations will also support dedicated staff at the library with a new and more centralized library branch manager's office, employee break room, working space, and added storage for library equipment central to the circulation desk.

The Blue Ridge Regional Library Foundation accepts donations at any branch location, through its website at brllfoundation.org, or via mail at BRRL Foundation-Bassett Expansion Project, Bassett Branch Library, 3969 Fairstone Park Highway, Bassett, VA 24055. The Blue Ridge Regional Library Foundation is a 501c3 and donations are tax deductible.

Martinsville

(cont. from page 1)

internal promotions and several other employees who were hired around the same time she started in October.

Ferrell-Benavides said part of the equation is starting to move forward as a business, especially as everyone learns their way and adjusts to their roles.

"I always remind people that while we are a government agency, we still have business-type operations. My goal in any organization is to create a high-performing organization, so that's really assessing where we are and what we need to do to stabilize," she said and added her starting points are policy, processes, and procedures, which are the foundation of any organization.

"The biggest challenge now is making sure that we have reviewed and updated our policies and making sure that they're representing the best practices that are available in our field," she said.

Ferrell-Benavides believes the biggest area the city can improve in is economic development and looking at how it can spend more time focusing on the downtown area, "meeting with some of our retail community to focus" and identify "the things that we need to create that mix in that vibrancy."

While she believes Martinsville has undergone a great transition process from its manufacturing history including Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) and economic development, she notes that people want to see liveliness in the city.

"We see individuals coming into our city, young and old, and people may say it's an age, but I see a lot of young people when you look at our restaurants and our places," she said.

Ferrell-Benavides said the city needs to focus

on the downtown vibrancy and look at what it can do to get and keep businesses in the city, in partnership with the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce and economic development organizations.

Before she officially became city manager, Ferrell-Benavides said the council reestablished the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to focus on internal economic development.

"They have named a group of individuals to serve in that role. They started out with touring the city and looking at opportunities where we can enhance our city government and enhance our economic development efforts," she said.

For example, she said a group wants to move to the former Armory site and another site that's asked for proposals (RPFs) and interest from other hotels who are interested in moving there.

"Bringing people here has been one of my big focuses because I think we need some outside ideas and some individuals to really take charge and start to look at what innovative things we can do, and what companies would be attracted to us," she said.

Ferrell-Benavides said the city is currently working on its new strategic plan to help guide the city forward with its goals, while "refocusing on what is our vision, what is our mission, what are our key goals. We've identified several areas of focus but what I'd like to do is consolidate those into pillars of functions."

Ferrell-Benavides said she prefers strategic planning to be done with both goals and measurements.

"One of the things that I plan to implement is, I'm revamping our entire budget and budget process, creating a more community-engaged

process but also focusing our budget dollars around performance measurements and workload measurement," she said.

The primary feedback from city staff thus far is that she brings a different perspective.

"Part of it is I told anyone when I got here, my transition plan focused a lot on listening and learning. So, I spent most of my first two months just understanding who the people are and what they're doing," Ferrell-Benavides said and added that another of her goals is organizational development.

"How do you develop your team to become high-performing? That's by empowering them, listening to them, getting them used to knowing there are no bad ideas and having the opportunity to make mistakes and just learn from it," she said.

Ferrell-Benavides said she decided to take the position in part because she wanted to move back to the East Coast.

After being in Texas for just over two years, Ferrell-Benavides said she had a desire to come back to Virginia.

"After my position in Texas was terminated, and I spoke with one of the recruiters here about opportunities, they mentioned Martinsville," she said. Once she visited the city and met with the council and the mayor, Ferrell-Benavides said she was impressed with the community.

"I didn't know a lot about Martinsville, but I came here for the interview, spent some time in the city for a couple of days, and really found it to be a wonderful place," she said.

"When COVID hit, and because of COVID I had a couple of deaths in my family and decided I needed to go back home, make sure my grandmother and family were okay, which is what I did," she said.

GO TEC® announces Rigney as director

Angela Rigney has been named the director of the Great Opportunities in Technology and Engineering Careers (GO TEC®) program, effective Feb. 19, according to a release from the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR).

Rigney, an innovative educator and champion for career and technical education, most recently spent 13 years as the Director of Career, Technical and Adult Education for Pittsylvania County Schools, and brings more than two decades of experience in K12 education and adult workforce development programs.

With a vision to inspire and prepare students for high-demand careers in technology and engineering, GO TEC is an innovative talent development initiative that started in Southern Virginia and is expanding across the Commonwealth. Rigney will oversee the program's growth as Career Connections Labs and curriculum are implemented throughout Virginia in middle schools from Abingdon to Hampton Roads.

"I am honored by this opportunity to lead GO TEC, especially during this critical time of growth," said Rigney. "Working with our many partners across K12, industry, higher education and economic development, we will continue to inspire middle school students, highlight STEM careers and, ultimately, create dependable talent pipelines."

The GO TEC program provides middle school students with innovative, hands-on exposure to careers in strategic sectors – and helps them identify the steps needed to pursue those careers. IALR serves as the fiscal agent and program lead for GO TEC, which provides applied STEM education and connects students to careers in strategic growth sectors.

"Angela's dedication to educational excellence and her experience with career and technical education initiatives align perfectly with our mission to drive economic growth through STEM education, skill development and work-based learning," said Dr. Julie Brown, Vice President of Advanced Learn-

ing, IALR. "We are confident that Angela will be a capable and visionary leader for GO TEC as we continue to expand and enhance our efforts in preparing students for the workforce of tomorrow."

Rigney joins the GO TEC program at a critical moment in the program's growth. Through GO Virginia, local government and philanthropic funding and in partnership with three in-region coordinating entities (IRCEs) – EO (formerly the United Way of Southwest Virginia), the Commonwealth Center for Advanced Manufacturing (CCAM) and Old Dominion University Research Foundation (ODURF) – the GO TEC team is implementing the GO TEC Career Connections curriculum and classrooms in middle schools across the Commonwealth. After starting as a pilot program in Danville and Pittsylvania County Schools, more than 9,000 students from 44 different middle schools will interact with the GO TEC curriculum annually beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.

In more than 20 years working with Pittsylvania County Schools,



Angela Rigney

Rigney's titles included Agriculture Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal and Director of Career, Technical and Adult Education. Rigney holds a master's degree in educational leadership from Radford University and a Bachelor of Science in agriculture from Ferrum College.

See more at www.henrycountyenterprise.com

Sports Schedule

Following are the dates and times of local high school teams and their games for the week of March 11-16:

3/11	4:30p	Girls Tennis William Byrd at Bassett	3/13	4:30p	Girls Tennis Patrick County at Bassett	6pm	Girls Soccer Magna Vista vs McMichael (Smith River Complex)	
	4:30p	Girls Tennis Staunton River at Magna Vista		4:30p	Girls Tennis Magna Vista at Franklin County	7pm	Girls Soccer Martinsville at Magna Vista	
	4:30p	Boys Tennis Bassett at William Byrd		4:30p	Boys Tennis Patrick County at Bassett (Jaycee Park)	3/15	4pm	Boys Tennis Alleghany at Bassett
	4:30p	Boys Tennis Magna Vista at Staunton River		4:30p	Boys Tennis Franklin County at Magna Vista		5pm	Baseball Floyd County at Bassett
	4:30p	Softball Magna Vista at Morehead		5pm	Baseball Heritage at Bassett		5pm	Baseball Gretna at Magna Vista
	7pm	Girls Soccer Bassett at William Byrd		5pm	Baseball Magna Vista at Chatham		5pm	Baseball Patrick County at Martinsville (Hooker Field)
	7pm	Boys Soccer William Byrd at Bassett		5pm	Baseball Wiliam Fleming vs Martinsville (Hooker Field)		5pm	Softball Floyd County at Bassett
3/12	4:30p	Baseball McMichael at Magna Vista		5pm	Softball Patrick County at Bassett		5pm	Softball Gretna at Magna Vista
	5pm	Baseball Bassett at Carroll County		5pm	Softball Chatham at Magna Vista		7pm	Girls Soccer Martinsville at Patrick County
	5pm	Softball Bassett at Carroll County	3/14	4:30p	Girls Tennis Bassett vs Lord Botetourt (at Hollins College)		7pm	Boys Soccer Patrick County at Martinsville
	7pm	Girls Soccer Magna Vista at Magna Vista						
	7pm	Boys Soccer Magna Vista vs Staunton River (Smith River Complex)						

A VMFA curated exhibit to be displayed at Piedmont Arts



Ken Smith's "Manco La Fortuna" will be on display in the Pannill Gallery at Piedmont Arts.

Join Piedmont Arts for an opening reception in honor of the museum's new exhibits, Friday, March 29, 5:30-7:30 p.m., at the museum. The exhibits will be on display from March 30 to May 11. Exhibits are always free and open to the public.

Salvador Dali: 'Les Chants de Moldoror' was organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Featuring 44 etchings that the Spanish Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí created in Paris in 1934, as well as a portrait of the artist by Carl Van Vechten from the same year, this exhibition presents the unique proof set for the complete series of etchings that make up the first edition of 'Les Chants de Maldoror' — the infamous 1869 prose poem by Isidore Ducasse. This exhibit coincides with the 100th anniversary of the launch of the Surrealist movement in 1924 and was curated by Dr. Michael R. Taylor, Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Dr. Elliot King, Associate Professor of Art History at Washington and Lee University. Both Dr. Taylor and Dr. King will be in attendance at the opening reception for a gallery talk.

'Citizens and Soldiers: The Mostly World War II Paintings,' by Ken Smith will be on display in the Pannill Gallery. These paintings were created for the Advanced Squad Leader board game, originally reproduced on game boxes, magazines and folders. The exhibit contains 15 paintings spanning the era of 1939 (Kollaa Holds) to 1950 (Frozen). Smith is an associate professor of graphic design at Radford University. He is a current or former member of the Society of Illustrators, the Society of Publication Designers, the AIGA, the Salmagundi Club and the Coast Guard Art Program, where he has won the



Salvador Dalí — "Plate (facing page 106) from Les Chants de Maldoror (The Songs of Maldoror)", 1934, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment is one of 44 sketches that will be on display at Piedmont Arts.

prestigious George Grey Award of Artistic Excellence on three separate occasions. His paintings and illustrations are featured at the East Tennessee Historical Society, the McClung Museum in Knoxville, Tennessee, and at Fort Loudoun State Historic Area museum in Vonnore, Tennessee.

The Lynwood Artists Gallery features work by Meritha Alderman, a multi-media artist known for her signature "paintings" created using dryer lint. Alderman has a BFA in studio art and an MA in art education. She is originally from Roanoke, Virginia, and now lives in Martinsville where she is an art teacher at Laurel Park Middle School.

The Lynwood Artists Gallery is curated by Lynwood Artists, an organization for practicing artists in the Martinsville-Henry County area. Its members share a desire to stimulate understanding and enjoyment of fine art and the artistic process, while providing area artists with opportunities to exhibit and further develop their talents.

The opening reception and exhibits are sponsored by Margie & Paul Eason, Rhonda Edwards, Olivia & Pres Garrett, Tracie Heavner & Jim Frith, Drs. Shana & Japhet LeGrant, Jackie Thornton, and Lynwood Artists

The opening reception is free and open to the public. Complimentary wine and light refreshments will be served. RSVP required by March 25 and can be made by calling the museum or online at PiedmontArts.org.

More than \$1.25 million in funding heads to 48th District

Del. Eric Phillips announced more than \$1.25 million in funding for Virginia's 48th District and surrounding areas in his first session, including:

- Blue Ridge Regional Airport: \$953,094.00 for Runway Extension - Phase 2 Bid Additive
- Danville Regional Airport: \$95,643.55 for Box Hangar and Training Facility Site Preparation & Parking Lot Expansion
- The City of Danville and Pittsylvania County each submitted applications to fund the expansion of their shared drug treatment court in the 22nd Judicial Circuit. Danville was awarded \$87,206, and Pittsylvania was awarded

\$118,861 for this joint project.

"This is exciting news for the 48th District," said Phillips. "These investments will combat opioid addiction in our community and provide improvements in infrastructure that will lead to job creation and economic development. I am proud of the work that we are doing for our District, and I look forward to continuing to deliver real results for Southside and Southwest Virginia."

"There is still work to be done, and I am hopeful that, despite the partisan divide in Richmond, we are able to continue delivering for our Commonwealth," Phillips added.



Rhondha R. Thomas (at far left) welcomed Virginia Tech faculty members from Outreach and International Affairs — including Susan E. Short (second from left), associate vice president of engagement, and Julie Walters Steele (second from right) — and three descendants of the Reynolds Homestead enslaved community — Kimble Reynolds Jr. '88, M.S. '95, Kevin Reynolds, and Kenneth Reynolds — to Clemson University last summer. Photo by Diane Deffenbaugh for Virginia Tech.

Community Invited to Call My Name Program in Critz

On March 11 and 12, Rhondha Thomas, the Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature at Clemson University, and three colleagues, historian Sara Collini, genealogist Deborah Robinson, and project manager Marjorie Campbell will visit Virginia Tech's Reynolds Homestead in Critz, VA. Part of the team helping Clemson University uncover its hidden legacy of slavery, the four will discuss their collaborative approach to discovering and sharing history with two community-based events.

On Monday, March 11 at 6:30 p.m. the Reynolds Homestead will host a dinner and conversation with Thomas and her colleagues. Black community members are especially encouraged to join the conversation and bring their own stories and photographs to share. The Reynolds Homestead will also share documents that were collected by historian John Whitfield who conducted research to learn names of the individuals who were enslaved at the Reynolds Homestead, formerly known as Rock Spring Plantation.

On Tuesday, March 12 at 8:30 a.m., Thomas and her team will return to Critz for a community breakfast at the Reynolds Homestead. They will provide a presentation on their work in the communities surrounding the Clemson University to gather and share stories of Black people who lived and worked there.

In July 2023, Kimble Reynolds, Jr., Kevin Reynolds, and Kenneth Reynolds joined Virginia Tech employees Julie Walters Steele, Susan Short and Diane Deffenbaugh on a visit to Clemson University to meet with Thomas and her team to learn about the work being done at Clemson University to share stories of the Black people who lived and labored at the University and in surrounding communities.

When Thomas first saw the list of the names of 50 enslaved persons in the 1854 deed for the sale of US statesman John C. Calhoun's Fort Hill Plantation, she whispered the names aloud and vowed to share them with the world. Months earlier, she had learned Clemson University, her place of employment, was built on Fort Hill. Yet the names of the enslaved were not called during the tours of the plantation house that sits in the middle of campus. To document the stories of enslaved persons and other Black people who contributed to Clemson University history, Dr. Thomas realized she would need the assistance

of her campus and local communities.

Through call and response — calling names aloud on social media, in a play, on a walking tour, in a 5K, on a heritage trail, in publications, in an exhibition, in public talks, etc.—and inviting the public to respond, her Call My Name project has developed into a multifaceted collaborative initiative that provides a space for all to help document and share these stories.

"I have been following Thomas's work for more than a decade and I've been so impressed with how she engaged Clemson employees and area citizens in the collection of stories of people who had played such an important role in Clemson University's history," Walters Steele said. "I felt there was a lot we could learn and apply at the Reynolds Homestead and in our communities."

Thomas led the visiting group on a tour of the campus and discussed Black men and women who helped build and provide services as the university was established—some were enslaved, others were convict laborers and later many were wage workers at the university.

Reflecting on the visit, Kimble Reynolds commented, "Every individual brings forth a name and legacy. The work at Clemson brings forth a reminder of how much value my ancestors provided in creating what is now referred to as the Reynolds Homestead, how the entire community benefits from their existence, and how deserving they are to be honored for their rightful place in history."

Brothers Kevin and Kenneth Reynolds enjoyed spending time with genealogist Robinson, who was quickly able to help them find names of some of their ancestors. "What really struck me from our meetings with the team at Clemson is the importance for us to talk to each other to learn more about our ancestors and stitch these stories together and make them come alive," said Kenneth Reynolds. "We need to be calling their names."

Anyone who is interested in attending the events can register on the Reynolds Homestead website: www.reynoldshomestead.vt.edu or by calling the office at 276-694-7181.

If you need assistance with registrations or if you are an individual with a disability and desire accommodations, please contact Julie Walters Steele by email at jws@vt.edu or phone (276-694-7181 ext. 23) at least 5 business days prior to the event.

P&HCC Recognized by Achieving the Dream as a 2024 Leader College of Distinction

Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) has been designated a Leader College of Distinction by Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national nonprofit dedicated to advancing community colleges as hubs of equity and mobility in their communities.

“Patrick & Henry Community College is honored to be one of only six schools in the nation to receive this important designation, which highlights our success in increasing retention and closing economic opportunity gaps,” said P&HCC president Dr. Greg Hodges, adding, “It is especially significant to us to recertify as a Leader College of Distinction, having been one of the original 26 colleges to join ATD in 2004.”

ATD created the Leader College of Distinction award in 2018 to recognize colleges that have pursued

and met challenging student success goals, often earning Leader College status several times. Leader Colleges of Distinction must show improvement in three or more student outcome metrics, including at least one lagging indicator such as completion or transfer with an earned baccalaureate. Leader Colleges of Distinction are also required to show they have reduced equity gaps in at least two metrics for at least two student groups. These requirements recognize and motivate sustained and proactive reform efforts that result in greater improvements in student success and equity.

Patrick & Henry Community College was also presented with a special 20th anniversary award at ATD’s annual DREAM conference: the Net-

work Legend Award. Since 2004, ATD has worked with its network to innovate in response to the world’s current reality. The Network Legend Award recognized the 15 colleges that began their partnership with ATD in 2004 and celebrates their longevity in the Network.

P&HCC is part of the ATD Network, made up of 300+ colleges committed to advancing equity and supporting student success at their institutions and throughout their communities. P&HCC has been a member of the ATD Network since 2004.

ATD is a partner and champion of more than 300 community colleges across the country. Drawing on expert coaches, groundbreaking programs, and national peer network, the organization provides institu-

tions with integrated, tailored support for every aspect of their work — from foundational capacities such as leadership, data, and equity to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, building K–12 partnerships, and more. ATD calls this Whole College Transformation. Its vision is for every college to be a catalyst for equitable, antiracist, and economically vibrant communities. ATD knows that with the right partner and the right approach, colleges can drive access, completion rates, and employment outcomes — so that all students can access life-changing learning that propels them into community-changing careers. Follow ATD on X (Twitter), Facebook, and LinkedIn. To learn more, visit the Achieving the Dream (ATD) website: www.achievingthedream.org.

Salem VA Health Care System to hold Veteran Town Hall

The Salem VA Health Care System will hold a Town Hall for Veterans Tuesday, March 26 beginning at 2 p.m. in the Bldg. 5 Auditorium. Hospital leadership as well as representatives from the Veterans Benefits Administration will be on hand to provide information and answer questions.

Veterans who cannot attend the Town Hall are encouraged to submit questions by email: VHASAMPUBLICAFFAIRS@VA.GOV.

Vietnam-era Veterans who would have not received a Vietnam 50th Anniversary Commemorative pin and would like to have one presented during the Town Hall, should reach

out at the email above to schedule a pin presentation during the event.

Veteran Town Hall meetings are conducted quarterly. Meetings this year will be held March 26 at 2 p.m.; Wednesday June 5, at 2 p.m.; and Tuesday September 24 at 2 p.m.

County schools identified as ‘in need of support’

Two schools in Henry County are among 247 federally identified as schools in need of support based on Virginia’s federal accountability system under the ‘Every Student Succeeds Act’ (ESSA), according to a release from the Virginia Department of Education.

The increase in federally identified schools is driven by the Virginia Board of Education’s September 2022 adoption of requirements to close achievement gaps for Virginia’s most at-risk students, which reflects the board’s commitment to higher expectations for schools across the Commonwealth.

Fieldale-Collinsville and Laurel Park middle schools were among the local schools in the list for targeted support and improvement.

Under the state board’s more rigorous expectations now incorporated into Virginia’s federal accountability framework, 247 schools were identified as needing support and improvement. Conversely, Virginia’s state accreditation system reports 208 schools needing support. This confusing mismatch in federal and state criteria of school performance reinforces the importance of the State Board of Education’s work to ensure state accreditation ratings clearly and accurately communicate the performance of every school.

Federal law requires Virginia to identify schools needing support and improvement in three categories using the state’s federal accountability system. The Virginia Board of Education approves a Consolidated State Plan (“CSP”) defining how schools are identified under the federal accountability system. The latest CSP included the Board’s elevation of (i) learn-

ing loss recovery across all student groups, (ii) increased expectations of performance targets in reading and math to reflect increased academic expectations for all student groups, and (iii) full inclusion of chronic absenteeism as measures of school performance.

Alongside the existing investment, focus and partnership of the VDOE with school divisions on their learning loss recovery efforts, divisions with federally identified schools will also receive additional support from the VDOE Office of School Quality. Using a newly developed School Support Framework, the VDOE will assist and support divisions and schools in academics, staffing, professional learning, and school climate. The Office of School Quality will provide technical assistance to every division with schools identified as not meeting expectations so that they can conduct a needs assessment, select evidence-based interventions, and develop a support plan. These supports are being made available to federally identified schools starting immediately and will be on-going as the VDOE, divisions, and schools work to make sure every student receives an exceptional education and meets the high expectations set for them.

In addition to the introduction of learning loss as a school performance criteria, this year’s federal identifications also reflect the Virginia Board of Education’s action to raise the performance targets in reading and mathematics to reflect increased academic expectations for all student groups. These new higher performance expectations for all students continue increasing annually through 2027-2028 school

year.

The “announcement reinforces what the State Board of Education told Virginians in 2022 – our children suffered significant learning loss that began before the pandemic, but was exacerbated from extended school closures, and masked by lowered expectations defined in Virginia’s federal accountability and state accreditation frameworks,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Coons. “We have worked closely with school divisions to develop plans to reverse these trends, and today’s announcement shows the continued importance of the steps we have taken to help our students catch up and get ahead. We’re also focused on making sure that all our parents, teachers and students can rise to the challenge of higher expectations, greater transparency, and more focused instruction. Our role is to provide them the support to do so.”

“The board has taken deliberate actions since 2022 to ensure students, parents, and other community stakeholders are provided clear and understandable information about how well our schools are preparing students for the future beyond the walls of our classrooms,” said State Board of Education President Grace Turner Creasey. “We knew that increasing expectations and confronting chronic absenteeism head-on would yield some not-so-comfortable information about the state of some of our schools, but to best serve every student and every school in the Commonwealth, we must first identify struggling schools and then provide targeted supports to get every school and student back on track for success.”

Last September, to combat learning loss, Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly included \$418 million in the state budget for school divisions to provide high dosage academic tutoring, accelerate the preparations for improved instruction via the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), and combat chronic absenteeism. The \$418 million provides flexible funding for school divisions to continue their learning loss recovery efforts for three years.

VDOE has partnered with school divisions to create “ALL In” implementation plans to ensure spending is best positioned to improve student achievement. With every school division in the commonwealth having created its ALL In plan, efforts to reverse pandemic learning loss are underway across Virginia. The VDOE has also provided tutoring practice platforms to school divisions to help reinforce the in-person tutoring sessions taking place in school.

This year’s federal identifications also reflect the Virginia Board of Education’s decision to fully include chronic absenteeism measure of progress as an identification criterion for schools. Chronic absenteeism, measured as students missing 18 or more days of school for any reason, increased to 17% of all students in 2022-2023 from a 9% pre-pandemic level in 2018-2019. Chronic absenteeism has proven to have a significant impact on math and reading performance. Youngkin has appointed a Chronic Absenteeism Task Force to assist school divisions in developing solutions to many of the on-going causes of chronic absenteeism.

Initial unemployment claims decrease

The number of initial unemployment insurance claims decreased in the latest filing week to 1,996 and was at typical pre-pandemic volumes, according to data from the Virginia Department of Workforce Development and Advancement.

For the filing week ending February 24, seasonally unadjusted initial claims for unemployment insurance in Virginia totaled 1,996, which was a decrease of 276 claimants from the previous week. Continued weeks claimed totaled 15,736, which was a decrease of 81 claimants from the previous week but an increase of 34 percent from the 11,785 continued claims from the comparable week last year. An industry was reported for ninety-three percent of continued claims. Of those, over half (57 percent) of continued claims were from administrative and support and waste management (2,162), professional, scientific, and technical services (2,064), construction (1,529), manufacturing (1,324), and health care and social assistance (1,271). Eligibility for benefits is determined on a weekly basis, and so not all weekly claims filed result in a benefit payment. This is because the

initial claims numbers represent claim applications; claims are then reviewed for eligibility and legitimacy.

In the week ending February 24, the U.S. advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 215,000, an increase of 13,000 from the previous week’s revised level. The previous week’s level was revised up by 1,000 from 201,000 to 202,000. The advance number of actual U.S. initial claims under state programs, unadjusted, totaled 193,988 in the week ending February 24, a decrease of 5,349 (or -2.7 percent) from the previous week. There were 202,156 initial claims in the comparable week in 2023.

Looking at preliminary data, most U.S. states reported decreases on a seasonally unadjusted basis. Oklahoma’s preliminary weekly change (-1,986) was the largest decrease. Oregon’s preliminary weekly change (-1,376) was the second largest decrease. Texas’s preliminary weekly change (-1,299) was the third largest decrease. Michigan’s preliminary weekly change (-990) was the fourth largest decrease. Virginia had the thirteenth largest decrease (-332).

NC man sought in Ridgeway shooting



Timothy Brian Howell

Henry County Sheriff’s investigators are seeking a Kernersville, N.C. man wanted in connection with a shooting incident in Ridgeway.

According to a release from the Henry County Sheriff’s Office, the incident was reported on March 2, around 4:53 a.m., when the Martinsville-Henry County 911 Center received a call that a person at 5269 Mitchell Road in Ridgeway had been shot.

Henry County Sheriff’s deputies responded to the scene and found a man who suffered an apparent gunshot wound to his back. He was identified as Shannon Edward Bryant, 51, 5269 Mitchell Road, Ridge-

way.

Bryant was transported to SOVAH Health Martinsville for treatment of life-threatening injuries, according to the release. He is currently in stable condition.

Authorities determined that a second man visited the Mitchell Road home in the early morning hours. Shortly after that man’s arrival, an altercation occurred between the two men, with the visitor allegedly producing a firearm and shooting Bryant before fleeing the scene.

Warrants have been issued for Timothy Brian Howell, 43, of Kernersville, N.C. for malicious wounding, use of a firearm in commission of a felony and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Anyone with information about the incident or Howell’s whereabouts is asked to call the Henry County Sheriff’s Office at (276) 638-8751 or Crimestoppers at 63-CRIME (632-7463).

The Crimestoppers Program offers rewards up to \$2,500 for information related to crime. The nature of the crime and the substance of the information determine the amount of reward paid.

Winners of Black History Month Art Contest announced



Joanie Petty, Giovanni Xaca, Natalie Sykes, Ella Miles, Skylar Brim, Rania Womack, Alivia Preston, Leslie Martin.



Family, friends and others attended the Feb. 29 ceremony to announce the winning entries of the 9th annual Black History Month Art Contest.



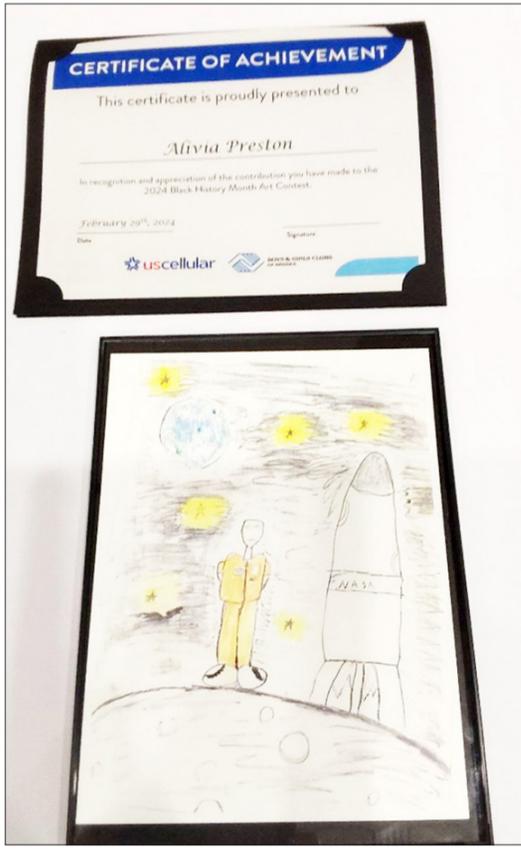
Rania Womack is shown with her winning artwork.



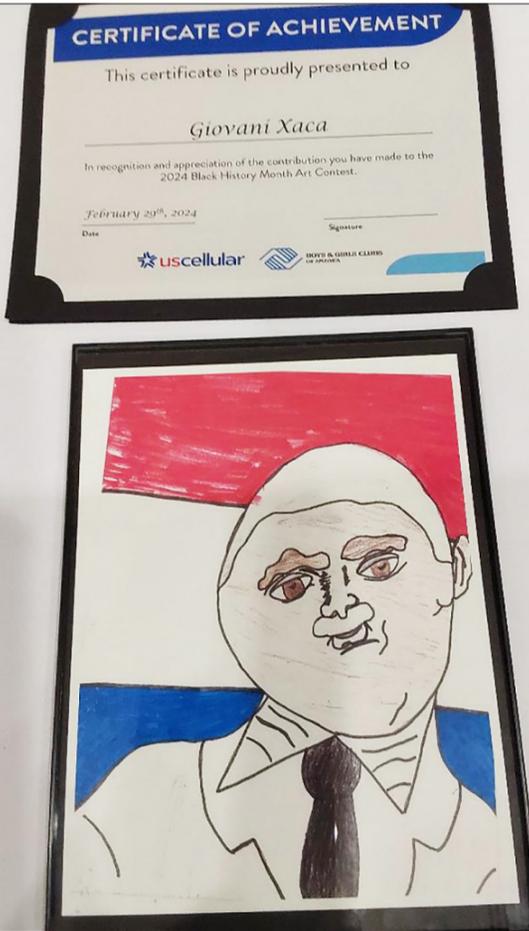
Giovanni Xaca is pictured with his winning submission.



Alivia Preston poses with the winning submission to the 9th annual Black History Month Art Contest.



Certificates of Achievement were presented to the artists who created the winning entries.



By Barbara Waldron
 Winners of the 9th annual Black History Month Art Contest were announced Feb. 29 during a ceremony at the New College Institute in Martinsville.
 Students participating in the contest were tasked with producing original pieces of artwork depicting important historical figures, such as scientists, educators, or world leaders that have made an impact in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).
 Several members of the Boys & Girls Club of the Blue Ridge participated.
 Joanie Petty, director of the organization, said, "Boys & Girls Club participants submitted artwork for the Black History Month contest, with the top ten finalists chosen by the Boys & Girls Club of the Blue Ridge."
 UScellular Store Manager Leslie Martin added, "Those top ten winners were put online by UScellular, and friends, family, or anybody could go online and vote for the top three winners."
 Public voting for the ten finalists was available online throughout February.
 Winning artists were awarded gift cards:
 Alivia Preston received \$250 for 1st place portrait of astronaut Mae Jemison.
 Giovanni Xaca received \$150 for 2nd place portrait of George Washington Carver.
 Rania Womack received \$100 for 3rd

place portrait of Dr. Marie M. Daly.
 "We do many events with the Boys & Girls Club of the Blue Ridge, not only Black History Month Art Contest," Martin said. "Over the last several years we've participated in other activities such as providing hot spots and modems so that students could do homework if they didn't have Internet capabilities. A lot of our Boys & Girls Club students need additional support like that to be able to have internet connectivity at home and UScellular understands that need."
 "We take a lot of pride in what we're doing with communities throughout the nation with our network," said Mid-Atlantic Sales Manager April Taylor.
 "We really enjoy working with the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Blue Ridge to celebrate Black History Month and to highlight the achievements of Black icons," said Martin.
 "UScellular has a corporate partnership with Boys & Girls Clubs across the country, wherever there are offices," Martin said. "Every year we are able to participate in Black History Month art competition, and we also have received 400 hotspots for our clubs. Comcast gave us laptops, so then we could provide both laptops and hotspots to students in need. This has also spread to other programs such as Booster clubs for softball or volleyball. We have given the concession stands hotspots to link to their Square so they can run concessions and not have to take cash payments.



Natalie Sykes, Ella Miles, and Skylar Brim received a Certificate of Appreciation for participating in the art contest.

This saves a ton of money and time."
 "We're bringing a service to an entity that didn't have access and it changes revenue for them as cash is not king anymore, and it changes the environment making it safer," Taylor said.
 UScellular's After School Access Project provides mobile hotspots and two years of service to nonprofits that support youth after the school day has ended and provides safe internet access for homework and education. To date, UScellular has reached 200,000 youth with STEM resources to shape future opportunities, connected more than 40,000 youth to Wi-Fi access, donated more than \$12 million in hotspots and service, contributed 16,000 volunteer hours, and matched \$250,000 in personal donations.

Lawmakers signal more support for electric vehicles, charging network

By Sam Bradley
Capital News Service

Lawmakers advanced legislation to expand electric vehicle infrastructure throughout the state, which could help meet a looming mandate that sales of new gas-powered vehicles be phased out by 2035.

More infrastructure, such as electric chargers, is needed to meet the deadline and growing EV demand.

Del. Richard "Rip" Sullivan, D-Fairfax, introduced House Bill 107, which creates the Electric Vehicle Rural Infrastructure Program and Fund. The measure financially assists developers in bringing EV chargers to rural areas that meet established conditions. Areas qualify based on population density, annual unemployment and poverty rates.

Funds would be used to offset nonutility costs, which include construction and some needed parts like breakers, conduits and cables. Developer grants would be capped at 70% of the cost to construct public charging stations.

The bill passed the House with bipartisan support, on a 71-27 vote. Sullivan requested \$50 million over the next two years for the fund. An employee would need to help manage the fund, on an estimated \$50,000 annual salary.

The House budget presented earlier this week reduced the amount to \$2 million in the current fiscal year.

"I look at it very positively, and I am hopeful about the bill's chances," Sullivan said about the budget. "Virginia is a very big place. We need a lot of EV charging stations around it, so I view this as a good start."

The number of public EV chargers in Virginia increased by approximately 75% since 2020,

per a study recently released by the Southern Environmental Law Center. Senior attorney Trip Pollard is the land and community program leader with the nonprofit advocacy group.

There are still big gaps in EV charger coverage. The state's transition to modern, more sustainable transportation will not happen overnight and the public needs to be prepared for it, according to Pollard.

A fund to help rural development is important to bridge the gap between EV ownership and its practicality in rural or lower-income communities. Legislation can help ensure no communities are left behind in the transition, Pollard said.

There has been a federal push to increase the spread of publicly available chargers through the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Pollard said. The federal funding appropriates \$106 million over five years to support the expansion of an EV charging network. Virginia can also apply for the \$2.5 billion dedicated to grants for EV charging.

There is a gap in rural coverage, since most charging infrastructure is centered around major interstates and highways. Many rural areas in Virginia are without the type of public ports needed to charge EVs quickly, according to a study from the Southern Environmental Law Center.

Private charging is the dominant option for EV owners. Roughly 90% of EV owners can install private chargers at their home, according to the study.

"That's one of the biggest areas that we need to address," Pollard said. "The majority of EV owners charge at home, but if you're in a multi-family that can often be very difficult to do."

EV charging standards for new development

Del. Adele McClure, D-Arlington, introduced HB 405, which tasks the Commission on Electric Utility Regulation to oversee the design standards and requirements to safely bring charging capabilities into new housing developments.

The commission would determine what type of electrical distribution infrastructure is needed to support EV charging facilities in new single-family and multifamily residential units.

When McClure canvassed during campaign season, she heard from constituents who said they wanted to see more EV infrastructure.

"I started thinking about ways where we can ensure that there are more charging stations, especially when it comes to new builds," McClure said.

The bill stems from conversations between home builders and environmentalists on the best way to remove barriers and lower the costs to build "easy-ready and EV-capable residential communities," McClure said.

All new vehicles sold must be electric models, starting in 2035. The mandate stems from the state's Clean Car law passed in 2021, which adopts California's standard. But 35% of all new cars and trucks sold in Virginia with a 2026 model year must be electric. Lawmakers have attempted to overturn the law, questioning if the state's infrastructure will be ready and if the vehicles are affordable enough.

Both of the bills are now waiting to be heard in committees, after crossing over to the Senate.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.

New Virginia bills tackle state's labor trafficking response

By Thailon Wilson
Capital News Service

Lawmakers passed bipartisan legislation to better protect victims of labor trafficking, who account for a large portion of human trafficking cases in Virginia.

Del. Mike Cherry, R-Chesterfield, introduced House Bill 633 to prosecute traffickers who have caused or plan to cause harm to individuals if they do not perform labor demands.

Any individual who has profited off of the forced labor of any person or child could be punished with a felony, according to the bill.

Labor trafficking is modern-day slavery, where individuals perform labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion, according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Methods can include debt bondage, use of violence and sometimes threats of deportation.

Commonwealth attorneys have the ability to prosecute sexual trafficking cases, but as of now, labor trafficking is not codified as a crime in Virginia, Cherry said. Prosecutors will be able to bring charges against sex and labor traffickers with the passage of the bill.

"About 40% of these trafficking cases that commonwealth attorneys are encountering are these labor trafficking situations," Cherry said. "The commonwealth attorney has to then turn those cases over to the federal government to prosecute, which may or may not happen and it certainly takes longer."

The proposal received unani-

mous support throughout each chamber of the General Assembly.

There are an estimated 27.6 million labor trafficking victims worldwide, according to the U.S. Department of State. Domestic work and construction were the most reported types of labor trafficking in Virginia in 2021, according to the hotline. Most trafficking goes unreported.

"This is the type of bill that makes sure that everyone is going to be treated equally, that people aren't going to be able to be used for labor or for the work of their hands and then not compensated properly and appropriately," Cherry said. "We want to make sure that we are closing this loophole here in Virginia and that we are protecting all of our citizens."

Linda Hawkins is CEO of Recover Hope, a nonprofit organization that fights human trafficking through education and restoration for survivors. The unanimous support for Cherry's bill was amazing and made her proud, she said.

"They're serving the most vulnerable people, our children and the vulnerable, our seniors and the disabled," Hawkins said. "This can happen to anybody."

Del. Shelly Simonds, D-Newport News, co-patron on Cherry's bill, introduced House Bill 581. The combination of both bills will work well together to tackle trafficking crime, Simonds said.

Simonds' bill requires commonwealth attorneys to establish multidisciplinary human trafficking response teams that meet at least annually to



Trafficking awareness sign. Virginia lawmakers pass legislation to bring awareness and tackle labor trafficking alongside all forms of human trafficking in session. Photo by Thailon Wilson/CNS.

discuss protocols and policies. These response teams will unite representatives from schools, law enforcement, health care and labor unions to better address the impact of trafficking on people, Simonds said.

"I think the most powerful thing about it is bringing people together," Simonds said. "We tend to be in silos."

Young people are often victims of labor trafficking, who are forced into difficult manual labor jobs like roofing and working night shifts, according to the delegate.

"Society needs a well educated group of young people to be healthy productive citi-

zens, and we don't want these 15 year olds robbed of their chance at an excellent education," Simonds said.

Efforts need to be coordinated at the state and the local level, Simonds said.

"We've got to come together to fight," Simonds said. "There's a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that is denying freedom to people in Virginia and all over the world."

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.

Legislation addresses long-standing VA foster care legal issues

Edwin J. Viera
Virginia News Connection

Virginia's General Assembly is taking up a bill to address outcomes for kids in foster care.

Previous legislation either failed to pass or was watered down in favor of further research on the issues. House Bill 893 would require Virginia's Judicial Council to adopt new standards for attorneys to qualify to represent parents in child dependency cases.

Valerie L'Herrou, deputy director of the Center for

Family Advocacy at the Virginia Poverty Law Center, described the impact it can have on families.

"When parents have better legal representation, the children achieve their permanency goal faster," L'Herrou pointed out. "On average, four months faster."

She pointed out the faster turnaround can reduce state foster care operation costs. Typically, Virginia spends \$305 million annually on foster care. Most opposition to previous bills has subsided, in

light of state research about the extent of the issue. The bill passed the House of Delegates and has been referred to the Senate Committee for Courts of Justice.

With more than 5,000 children in foster care, L'Herrou argued now is the time to act. She added if this bill passes, it could serve as a springboard for future improvements to the system.

"I think this will start giving judges information that they need in order to effectively decide cases," L'Herrou

emphasized. "When a case goes to court, you're hearing from both sides, and if you only hear from one side, then you're getting an incomplete picture."

The bill would also raise the rate of compensation for attorneys taking such cases. In the meantime, L'Herrou stressed programs are providing parents with sufficient legal representation. The Family Preservation Project has been filling the gap by taking what she calls a "holistic approach" to family separation cases.



New Resource Center Now Open

A new resource center just opened in Martinsville celebrates the success of community health workers there. The Growth & Opportunity Center, 311 Brown Street, Martinsville, opened its doors to community partners at a midday networking event February 27. Partners toured the facility, met staff, learned about the programs to be offered at the center, and left behind their organization's resource information.

That evening, families were welcomed to tour the building, participate in crafts, attend a read aloud with our

MHC Partners for Children, and share their feedback on programming they'd like to see provided in our area.

Following the grand opening festivities, a ribbon cutting was held, welcoming the center and the expansion of United Way of Henry County/Martinsville programming and resources.

The Growth & Opportunity Center's office hours are Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Fridays and Saturdays by Appointment Only. For questions and more information, call the coordinator, at (276) 403-3516.

Know your flood risk, protect your property during Flood Awareness Week

Gov. Glenn Youngkin has declared March 10-16 Virginia Flood Awareness Week. It marks a time for Virginians to prepare for potential flooding ahead of spring rains, summer downpours and the upcoming hurricane season.

"Floods are the most common natural disaster and can happen without warning across the commonwealth. We encourage Virginians to take proactive steps to protect themselves and their property by assessing their flood risk and with flood insurance coverage," said Department of Conservation and Recreation Director Matthew Wells.

DCR coordinates flood-protection activities across the state and helps communities comply with the National Flood Insurance Program, which allows homeowners to purchase federally backed flood insurance regardless of flood zone.

Virginians can input their address into DCR's Virginia Flood Risk Information System (VFRIS) to assess their property's flood risk. The online platform was recently updated for mobile compatibility and new features include 3D visualization and the Flood Stories tool.

DCR's Flood Awareness website offers tools and information including fact sheets, a cost calculator and a risk-assessment tool to help Virginians with flood preparedness.

The majority of homeowners and renters insurance policies do not cover damage from floods and storm surges. Only 3% of Virginians have flood insurance, according to the National Flood Insurance Program.

FEMA and the National Flood Insurance Program estimate that just 1 inch of water can cause over \$25,000 in damages to your home. Without flood insurance, residents could be responsible for paying recovery costs out-of-pocket.

Almost 90% of Virginia communities participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. Virginians can also purchase coverage through private insurers.

"Flood insurance is essential to recover and rebuild after a disaster," said Angela Davis, director of Floodplain Management. "It can take 30 days for a policy to go into effect, so Virginians should review their insurance now to ensure they have coverage well before a storm."

There are additional ways renters, homeowners and business owners can reduce potential flood damage to some, but not all, of their property. These include:

Storing important documents in waterproof containers, on an upper floor.

Caulking windows, doors and gaps where pipes and wires enter a building.

Labeling propane tanks with the owner's name and address.

Choosing tile or other waterproof flooring over carpeting on lower floors.

"Anywhere it can rain, it can flood," Davis added. "DCR is proud to be Virginia's partner in flood preparedness."

For more information about Virginia Flood Awareness Week, please visit www.dcr.virginia.gov/floodawareness-week.

Dairy farmers can now enroll in safety net program

Farmers can now enroll in the 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage program, an important safety net offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

DMC is a voluntary risk management program that provides protection to dairy farmers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed price falls below a certain dollar amount. This year's signup began Feb. 28 and ends April 29.

In addition to enrolling, farmers may adjust their production history for 2024, making program benefits retroactive to Jan. 1, noted Tony Banks, senior assistant director of agriculture, development and innovation for Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

For any payments that triggered in January, payments may begin as soon as March 4, according to USDA's Farm Service Agency. Coverage will be available through December.

The American Farm Bureau Federation previously sent a letter to the FSA urging them to open enrollment for the DMC program as soon as possible.

"AFBF is pleased the FSA listened to our concerns," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "Dairy farming comes with unique challenges, and vital farm bill programs like Dairy Margin Coverage help farmers weather the storm in tough times."

DMC offers different levels of coverage, even an option that is free to producers, minus a \$100 administrative fee. The fee is waived for dairy producers who are limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged or military veterans. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the online dairy decision tool.

For more information on DMC, visit the DMC webpage or contact your local USDA Service Center.

Hungry Mother State Park opens registration for new birding festival

Registration is open for Hungry Mother State Park's inaugural Life's Extras Birding Celebration, a festival to honor the life of long-time volunteer and Virginia Master Naturalist Randy Smith.

Smith, who always looked for "life's extras," passed away after a brief illness in January 2023. He loved spending time in nature and was an active birder. He maintained a list of bird species he had seen over his lifetime and took great joy in leading bird walks and owl prowls at Hungry Mother.

The park will honor his memory May 3-5 with a birding festival featuring 15 different birding activities, from bird hikes and owl paddles to a live raptor show and programs on bird rehabilitation. Speakers include birding experts, licensed wildlife rehabilitators, Virginia Master Naturalists and more.

Admission to the festival is \$25

for a three-day pass, which includes all festival events, a commemorative patch and a three-day parking pass for Hungry Mother State Park, or \$15 for a single-day ticket on Saturday or Sunday, which includes the programs on the day of your choice; parking and a commemorative patch are not included.

Registration for Life's Extras Birding Celebration closes on April 26. All proceeds from the festival will benefit the Friends of Hungry Mother State Park. To learn more or to register, click here (<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/event?id=2024-01-23-15-25-36-511057-c5s>).

The park also offers overnight accommodation for festival goers, including cabins, a family lodge, yurts and camping. Early reservations are encouraged. Book your stay online at reservevaparks.com or by calling 1-800-933-PARK (7275).

Miniature Herefords are compact cows that provide big benefits

They may be half the size of standard cattle, but miniature Herefords have a lot to offer farmers and they're growing in popularity.

With heart-warming videos that showcase pint-sized bovines grazing in fields circulating on social media, it's no wonder mini cattle are trending. And some breeds, like the docile miniature Hereford, are among the most popular.

"They're a great fit for (smaller farms) because their grazing requirements are far less than full-size cattle," explained Richard Fox, who operates Roslyn Farm & Vineyard in Albemarle County with his wife. "They also reduce the barrier of entry for families that want to raise cattle but, for various reasons, full-size cattle wouldn't be the right fit."

Fox, an Albemarle County Farm Bureau member, currently has six miniature Herefords as part of the farm's agritourism activities. He explained that a full-size cow needs 2 to 3 acres of productive pasture, whereas a single acre can support two miniature cattle.

According to the Miniature Hereford Breeders Association, there are over 500 miniature Hereford breeders in the U.S. who are registered with the association. The small cattle weigh 500 to 1,000 pounds compared to a full-size Hereford's 1,200 to 1,800 pounds, and their gentle disposition makes them well-suited for agritourism and youth 4-H and FFA projects.

"The miniature Herefords are

the perfect introduction into the show ring for many young, aspiring showmen," Fox added.

In addition to agritourism and youth competitions, Debbie and Tim Bryan of Bryan Hill Farm in Rockingham County noted that miniature Herefords are "a viable beef product."

"They're very healthy, very low maintenance," Tim said.

The Bryans began raising miniature Herefords over 20 years ago when looking for smaller animals for their children's livestock projects. With the beef product just as tasty and high-quality as full-size Herefords, they realized the smaller cows work well for families with limited acreage. They also require less fencing and feed—eating 30%-40% less than their larger counterparts.

"You can put one of these in the freezer and feed your family as opposed to having to split a full-size cow with someone," said Debbie, whose customers across the East Coast purchase the couple's cows.

In Goochland County, Mark Smith of Markley Farms maintains a herd of 20 to 30 miniature Herefords he sells for breeding, as family pets, and for beef. He said raising the animals has been "a fun experience."

"The minis range in size, with the smallest heifers being the most desirable for pets," Smith said. "Everyone wants the polled mini Hereford heifers. I could put them out on social media and probably sell every one."

Submit your community news and photos to dhall@theenterprise.net

House party set to help keep homes safe from drugs

Drug-Free MHC, in collaboration with a coalition of partners will host a community house party aimed at educating families on safeguarding their homes against drug misuse and other risky or problematic behaviors.

The event will be held on March 16, from noon to 3 p.m. at Patrick & Henry Community College Gym, 645 Patriot Avenue, Martinsville.

The mission of this initiative is to empower families with knowledge and resources to create drug-free environments within their households, fostering healthier and safer communities. Through interactive activities, educational materials, and expert-led discussions, attendees will gain valuable insights into prevention strategies and effective measures to protect their loved ones.

Partners joining Drug-Free MHC in the endeavor include Piedmont Community Services, Martinsville Police Department, Virginia Department of Health, CHILL, VHRC, Patrick & Henry Community College, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Blue Ridge, Henry County Sheriff's Office, ANCHOR, Omega Psi Phi, and the YMCA.

"The collaboration among our esteemed partners underscores our shared commitment to promoting substance abuse prevention and en-

surging the well-being of our community members," said Tobie Panos of Drug-Free MHC. "By coming together for this house party, we aim to equip families with practical tools and knowledge to create safe and supportive environments for their children and loved ones."

The house party will feature a range of activities and resources tailored to address the diverse needs of families, including interactive workshops, informational booths, and opportunities for one-on-one discussions with experts in the field of substance abuse prevention.

Several partnering agencies have said they are excited to engage with families and community members in meaningful conversations about drug prevention and education. By working together, partners are convinced "we can make a positive impact and build a stronger, healthier community for generations to come."

The event is free and open to the public, with free food provided and a 'backyard' zone for youngsters that will include inflatables and activities for all ages.

Families, parents, caregivers, and concerned community members are encouraged to attend and participate in this valuable opportunity to learn, connect, and collaborate for a drug-free future.

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Bring your family and join Drug-Free MHC and Partners as we take you on a tour of our "home".

- Community organizations & experts equipping families with tools to create safe environments that protect the youth in our community.
- Children enjoying a "backyard" zone complete with inflatables & activities for all ages & receive age-appropriate encouragement on how to make positive drug-free choices.
- End the afternoon with FREE hot dogs with your family & put your new tools to use!

CALL (276) 634-2910 TO ARRANGE FREE TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM THE EVENT













For more information or to arrange free transportation to and from the event, call (276) 634-2910.

Resolution honors Black donor as hidden figure in medical science

By Taya Coates
Capital News Service

The first human-to-human heart transplant in the South occurred without donor consent from the injured Black man or his family, to help a white businessman live.

Doctors in 1968 determined Bruce Tucker would not survive a severe head injury.

The medical team led by Dr. Richard Lower and Dr. David Hume of the Medical College of Virginia did not consult Tucker's family before the heart transplant, according to Senate Joint Resolution 16. The heart was not the only organ removed without consent.

The state legislature, 56 years later, was called on to address multiple instances of unethical use of Black bodies by medical institutions in Virginia.

Sen. Jennifer Boysko, D-Fairfax, introduced the resolution to acknowledge such practice with "profound regret."

The resolution unanimously passed the Senate and House. Boysko filed the resolution last year, but the Republican-led House Rules Committee never advanced it.

The resolution "was not given a true hearing in the House of Delegates last year," Boysko said.

This year looks promising for a different outcome due to a change in leadership, she said.

"The people who are leading today have a different perspective and a commitment to trying to make Virginia an equitable and safe place for everyone," Boysko said.

Gayle Turner, a family representative of the Tucker family, described her second cousin as a "hidden figure in medical science."

"He worked at the same place for more than 20 years ... and he had filed for civil service in World War II," Turner said. "He was willing to fight for his country and he



Panels at the MCV discovery site of over 53 stolen bodies from African American burial grounds commemorate the history of the victims and current efforts to amend the situation. Photo by Taya Coates of Capital News Service.

loved his country and family."

Tucker's brother, William Tucker, filed a lawsuit against the surgeons in 1968. The case ended in 1972 with a ruling in favor of the doctors, according to court documents.

Phillip Thompson, former Loudoun County NAACP president, was "astounded" by Tucker's story and brought the issue to Boysko last year, he said to Senate committee members.

The Tucker family expressed appreciation to Boysko and Thompson.

"We are pleased that Virginia is poised to recognize, realize and apologize for past wrongs to assure they never happen again," the Tucker family stated in an email. "We pray that the full House affirms this resolution."

"The Organ Thieves: The True Shocking Story of the First Heart Transplant in the Segregated South" by Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist Chip Jones is an in-depth look at the events and larger systemic issues that were at play in Tucker's case.

"Without 'The Organ Thieves' and without asking for the apology, I'm not sure if VCU would have apologized, because the way they apologized was so shallow and hollow," Turner said.

VCU released a public apology statement in September 2022 and sent a letter to the Tucker family in September 2023.

The university selected "The Organ Thieves" as its Common Book in 2022. The book was required reading for all first-year students and was discussed at events open to the community.

Jones discovered the story while working at the Richmond Academy of Medicine, the state's oldest and largest medical society. He was informed of plans for an event in 2018 to honor the 50th anniversary of the state's first human heart transplant.

"As a former reporter, my antenna kind of went up," Jones said.

The most important aspect of his work was the possibility of closure for Tucker's family, according to Jones.

"Bruce was a good man, a good person," Turner said. "He deserved better."

The Tucker family hopes the legislation will motivate VCU to lead by example on the nationwide issue of providing justice for the medical misuse of Black bodies.

Construction workers discovered an MCV well that contained the human remains of at least 53



Dr. Shawn Utsey, VCU Chair of African American Studies and filmmaker with experience covering local issues concerning the Black community. Photo by Taya Coates of Capital News Service.

individuals in 1994, according to the resolution. A majority of the discarded remains were African or of African descent.

Shawn Utsey, who holds a doctorate in counseling psychology, is currently serving his third term as chair of the Department of African American Studies at VCU.

"The reason that VCU is able to be a leader is because they had an advantage that began in the 1800s," Utsey said. "That advantage was access to Black bodies."

Medical students and staff in Richmond employed grave robbers to perform dissections in the 1800s, according to the measure.

At least 53 bodies were "callously and disrespectfully" discarded into the well afterward, according to VCU.

VCU's Archaeological Research Center sent the remains to the Smithsonian Institution for investigation in 1994. The excavated contents were ultimately placed in storage without funding from VCU.

VCU President Michael Rao established the East Marshall Street Well Planning Project and Committee in 2013. The project unveiled panels to honor the remains at the site of the discovery, as a part of the VCU Office of Health Equity's History and Health Program in 2021.

Most recent project efforts include DNA analysis on the remains to locate living relatives, scholarships and memorial installations.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.

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Dark Sky Week resolution highlights ‘wonder and awe’ of star gazing

By Sam Bradley
Capital News Service

Lawmakers unanimously supported a resolution that encouraged Virginians to “ponder the cosmic eons beyond” and consider the impact of increased light pollution.

Del. David Reid, D-Loudoun, introduced House Joint Resolution 74 to designate the week of the new moon in April as International Dark Sky Week. Gov. Glenn Youngkin issued a proclamation the past two years in observance of the week, but it will now have official designation and be placed on the General Assembly website.

The resolution sheds light on a dark sky movement that values darkness to appreciate “the beauty of the night sky above” and explores solutions to minimize light pollution.

“This first part is about awareness,” Reid said, with hopes people will think about the kinds of lighting used in their homes or businesses.

Reid was inspired by an avid photographer friend to present the resolution to the General Assembly, in addition to his own self-described amateur forays into astronomy.

“It’s again, awe inspiring when you can look through the telescope and see these things with your own eyes,” Reid said.

He hopes that clearer night skies may encourage children to engage with science, technology and engineering programs at a young age.

The DarkSky International organization defines light pollution as the human-made alteration of natural levels of light. This can occur from the harsh exterior lighting of buildings, parking lots and street lamps.

Light pollution harms migratory birds and other local wildlife in addition to blocking out the night sky, according to the organization.

The annual cost of wasted energy in the U.S. is estimated to be roughly \$3 billion, according to the resolution and previous proclamations from the governor’s office.

The first lighting ordinance was passed in Arizona in 1958. The DarkSky organization began advocacy in 1988 to educate and preserve starry views throughout the world, according to its website.

The history of Dark Sky Week is rooted in a Virginia suburb and North Carolina beach. Midlothian native Jennifer Barlow realized as a teen that her view of the stars was not the same in her backyard as it was at the beach, according to a University of Virginia profile.

Barlow’s mission to “spread the wonders



Vibrant shades of color over Stanley, Virginia during a 2023 geomagnetic storm. The picture was taken in Shenandoah National Park near Big Meadows. Courtesy of Peter Forister.

of the skies in their full beauty” reached a worldwide audience and became the inspiration for International Dark Sky Week, she told Sky and Telescope in 2006.

The celebratory week was first observed in April 2003. International Dark Sky Week will occur from April 2-8 this year, according to DarkSky.

Virginia describes itself as the home of “some of the best stargazing on the East Coast.” And there are several renowned observatories and parks, according to the resolution.

James River, Natural Bridge, Sky Meadows and Staunton River state parks are officially designated as Dark Sky parks. This means that these parks follow strict lighting ordinances to prevent light pollution and obscuration of the night sky.

George Spagna is the former director of Randolph-Macon College’s Keeble Observatory and former mayor of Ashland, a town about 20 miles north of Richmond.

“We have grown into a nation of people who are afraid of the dark,” Spagna said. “The problem with being afraid of the dark is you can’t see the wonders of the universe around you.”

Randolph-Macon College has offered astronomy courses since their relocation to

Ashland in 1868. Star-gazing classes were on the catalog as early as 1872, according to Spagna.

Spagna worked with Ashland to meet light pollution standards established by the International Dark Sky Association. He explained that lighting can often be an afterthought for developers, and an official Dark Sky week could help make the public more cognizant of light pollution.

Staunton River State Park was the first Virginia park in 2015 to be designated by the international organization, and the 25th in the world.

Chapel Hill Astronomical and Observational Society hosts the biannual Staunton River Star Party at the park, with the spring event held this year March 4-10. Astronomers camp for the week and aim equipment toward the dark sky.

Public day for the star party will be held March 8, from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., for those who wish to observe the “transitive nightfall of diamonds.”

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.



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